

THE MEDIA SPECTACLE OF TERRORISM AND RESPONSE-ABLE
LITERATURE

A Dissertation
by
DAVID COCKLEY

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2009

Major Subject: English

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ABSTRACT

The Media Spectacle of Terrorism and Response-Able Literature. (May 2009)

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Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. Marian Eide

A movement in literature has evolved out of the aftermath of 9/11 to confront the spectacle of terrorism perpetuated by the corporate news media and find a way to respond to terrorism in a more ethical manner. In this dissertation, I examine the influence of the media on literary production in the post-9/11 environment and how writers push back against the foreclosure of the media spectacle of terrorism. I examine a particular practice, infotainment, which crosses over from television news into literature that focuses on terrorism, and I lay out the theoretical framework for understanding literary responses to this practice. Since 9/11, the corporate media has been fixated with terrorism, and the vast amount of literature produced since the tragedy that focuses on terrorism demonstrates terrorism's influence on literary production. I expose a theoretical basis for how literature intervenes in the spectacle of terrorism, offering a challenge to media foreclosure through an ethical engagement. Then, I examine texts in both the American and global contexts to determine how they intervene in the foreclosure and form more ethical responses. Writers like Don DeLillo and Moshin Hamid confront the unified definition of terrorism the corporate media presents by opening the subject to unanswered questions and in-depth examinations from all

angles that enable responses rather than close off diverse perspectives. Literary writers strive to respond to the singular nature of each event, while positing an understanding of the plight of victims and perpetrators alike. The texts I examine each engage the foreclosure of the media spectacle of terrorism, creating a critical discourse by opening gaps, imposing ethical hesitation, reinstituting singularity, and responding to terrorism in an ethical manner. Don DeLillo posits an exemplary challenge to writers issued by terrorism in an often quoted line from *Mao II*: “What terrorists gain, novelists lose. The degree to which they influence mass consciousness is the extent of our decline as shapers of sensibility and thought.” DeLillo, along with other contemporary writers, takes up this challenge in order to ethically respond to the spectacle of terrorism.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: ETHICAL RESPONSES TO TERROR

Sherman Alexie's aptly titled "Can I Get a Witness?" questions the way media representations of the 9/11 tragedy have foreclosed contemporary understandings of terrorism. In the story, eyewitnesses to a suicide bombing in Seattle confuse the actual event with their memory of what took place in New York. "They expected airplanes to fall out of the sky and catch the city on fire. But this disaster was not that disaster; this explosion was small and real, while that other explosion was larger and distant and existed only on film and video and in memory" (73). Forty-two people were killed in the story's "small" blast, not much of a comparison to the events of 9/11, which killed over three thousand and targeted icons of American prosperity. But for the eyewitnesses, the terrorist event they had witnessed solely through media representations superseded the traumatic experience of the current situation. Alexie makes the point of showing how 9/11 takes precedence in the mind of these spectators, as if to say that from the American perspective no terrorist event can take place without evoking the memory of September 11, 2001. In the days that followed 9/11, the round the clock news coverage, the repetition of the falling towers from every conceivable angle, and the nationalistic discourse from various commentators that did not permit anything less than absolute

This dissertation follows the style of the *MLA Style Manual*.

horror at what took place solidified the event as the definitive terrorist act. The witnesses in Alexie's story could not separate the "real" explosion from their *corporate television media* driven idea of a terrorist act, even though one took place in front of their eyes, and the other was filtered through the lens of a camera.¹

By evoking this simulacrum where the images of terrorism take precedence over the actual experience, Alexie uncovers the problematic nature of the question he asks in the title of the short story.² The *media spectacle* codifies the idea of terrorism through the repetition and constant return to images of the World Trade Center attacks until it stands in for the real, covering over the impact of other events and the complex nature of any single act of terrorism. I formulate the *media spectacle* based on an application of Guy Debord's concept of the spectacle to the television images that are its most prevalent manifestation in the contemporary world. The spectacle, in Debord's terms, draws viewers' attention with repeated, dramatic images of an occurrence. The effect is that the images define the understanding of what is portrayed, cutting off critical discourse and codifying the understanding offered by the spectacular images. In the post-9/11 world, the spectacle of the terror attacks on the World Trade Center fills in the meaning of terrorism. Witnesses to other acts of terror expect burning buildings, and secondary witnesses, those who will experience the event solely through the television media, need the spectacular "film and video" in order to confirm the event occurred and

¹ I refer to the *corporate media* to delineate the mainstream media sources that have a corporate purpose, a profit motive that overrides any other motive in presenting news stories. I will discuss this further in the first chapter.

² Baudrillard describes a simulacrum as a "map that precedes the territory" (*Selected Writings* 169).

place it in the context of what they know to be terrorism. The witnesses buy into the spectacle that unifies the act by putting forth a single definition that becomes an accepted norm for the audience. This forecloses the meaning of the terrorist act even for the witness as if the prior tragedy controls the response to the current one, making the witness as much of an object as the victim of the terrorist bombing, because the act controls the discourse that derives from it. 9/11, thus, codifies the meaning of terrorism, extending it to cover everything that can usefully fit under the spectacle and closing off ethical responses.

An ethical act of witnessing, a process I will describe below, complicates this unity and goes beyond what fits easily with the media constructed definition. Alexie's protagonist points out the ease of following the logic of the spectacle: "You can let any event have one meaning, right?" (89). Yet, she complicates the idea by qualifying the previous statement with a divergent point of view: "All right, then, maybe September eleventh means things nobody has thought of yet" (89). In order to be an ethical witness, the complex and multiple nature of the situation has to be considered, and singular understandings must be allowed to form. Without such a process, Alexie's question, "Can I Get a Witness?" will be answered with a negative response. When terrorism becomes the type of spectacle that hijacks reality and controls journalistic media and, by proxy, the public discourse of the time, it has the terrorists' intended if not even greater impact on society. The difference between witnessing terrorism in-person and experiencing terror through the media's portrayals loses significance when reactions are co-opted in advance by previous media spectacles. The salient question remains, how

to be faithful to the event at hand. The “vicarious” witnesses, people who experienced the trauma through the media rather than first-hand, far outnumber those that physically experienced the tragedy of 9/11. The media spectacle has a much greater influence in that respect. Writers acknowledge the global reach of the American news media by viewing the event and the aftermath, including the changed security environment of the western world, from diverse perspectives and varied backgrounds. In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Moshin Hamid presents the example of a Pakistani man working in the Philippines and watching the events of 9/11 on live television.³ In doing so, the writer tacitly acknowledges the global reach of the corporate media and its immediate impact. It is an indirect trauma carried around the globe on corporate media networks that directly influences the local cultures.

This begs the question, how do we reliably and ethically witness terrorism in a world driven by hyper-real media spectacles? In a world where politics and the news media have been dominated by references to the events of 9/11 and the consequences of allowing something of that magnitude to occur again, the importance of the question cannot be underestimated for understanding our contemporary world. I argue that 9/11 produced a shift in news media representations of terrorism. Hardly a broadcast could go to air without a story about terror related topics. The opinions of the corporate media shifted along the same lines as public opinion, from one of inquiry into motives and outcomes, to a position of always already knowing the evil intention of the attackers. The corporate media failed in that regard to remain unbiased and responsibly represent

³ I carry out a much more in-depth reading of the novel the third chapter.

terrorist attacks, something I will discuss further in Chapter II. Reacting responsibly to acts of terror and recognizing what needs to be done to move forward are imperative to working through terrorism and getting out of the nightmarish spectacle terrorism instills. A new means of witnessing and responding to terrorism in the post-9/11 environment needs to be realized in order to open up critical engagement.

In this dissertation, I aim to examine the influence of the media on literary production and how writers resist media foreclosure by appropriating television news practices and confronting their totalizing discourse by initiating an event that breaks apart foreclosed meanings. A movement in literature has evolved out of the aftermath of 9/11 to confront the spectacle the corporate media presents and find a way to respond to the spectacle of terrorism. I define a particular practice, infotainment, which crosses over from television news into literature that focuses on terrorism, and I lay out the theoretical framework for understanding literary responses to this practice. Infotainment relies on making the news entertaining for the audience instead of maintaining the responsibility of providing the most important information. Media critic Lance Bennett explains how the move toward more entertaining newscasts favors “soft” news over “hard” news, or news that entertains over news that informs (15). Dramatic images, as well, form a larger component of the broadcasts, taking up time that would otherwise be spent on explanation. Brigitte Nacos, a noted expert on terrorism and the media, describes how “Infotainment, far more than informative hard news, thrives on the very images and themes that terrorist incidents offer – drama, tragedy, shock, anger, grief, fear, panic” (37). Thus, terrorism creates the type of programming that draws an audience, especially

when those dramatic aspects are highlighted over the more informative news content. There is no single issue since 9/11 that dominates the corporate media's attention like terrorism, and the vast amount of literature produced since the tragedy that focuses on terrorism demonstrates terrorism's influence on literary production.⁴ I expose a theoretical basis for how literature intervenes in the spectacle of terrorism, offering a challenge to media foreclosure through an ethical engagement. Then, I examine texts in both the American and global contexts to determine how they intervene in the foreclosure and respond. I argue that texts confront the unified definitions of terrorism by opening the subject to unanswered questions and in-depth examinations from all angles that enable responses rather than close off diverse perspectives. Texts respond to the media spectacle by opening gaps in the foreclosure, allowing for spaces of uncertainty necessary to an ethical response.

Literary writers strive to respond to the singular nature of each event, while positing an understanding of the plight of victims and perpetrators alike.⁵ The writers covered in this dissertation each engage the foreclosure of the media spectacle of

⁴ Ward Just, Don DeLillo, Martin Amis, Lynn Sharon Schwartz, Jess Walter, Janette Turner Hospital, and many other contemporary writers have addressed the topic of terrorism.

⁵ I am using the term *singular*, derived from *singularity* and used in the same manner, to exemplify the way Derek Attridge defines both the singularity of an event and a literary text. "The singularity of a cultural object consists in its difference from all other objects, not simply as a particular manifestation of general rules but as a peculiar nexus within the culture that is perceived as resisting or exceeding all pre-existing general determinations" (63). Singularity needs to be understood as something more than the unique nature; it also contains an engagement with the other. Singularity along with absence, in this context, both derive possibility and diversity as opposed to foreclosure that closes down prospects and diverse understandings.

terrorism, creating a critical discourse by opening gaps, imposing absence, reinstituting singularity, and responding to terrorism in an ethical manner. The wealth of texts published since 9/11 referring to or directly confronting terrorism is a testament to the salience of the issue. Don DeLillo posits an exemplary challenge to writers issued by terrorism in an often quoted line from *Mao II*: “What terrorists gain, novelists lose. The degree to which they influence mass consciousness is the extent of our decline as shapers of sensibility and thought” (157). DeLillo, along with other contemporary writers, takes up this challenge in order to ethically respond to the spectacle of terrorism created by the corporate media. The novels covered in this dissertation each confront the spectacle of terrorism in a particular way. The international texts, discussed in Chapter III, come from diverse backgrounds showing the way images travel across global networks and the diverse effects on local populations. I focus on American texts in Chapter IV in order to discuss the post 9/11 literary movement in the U.S., while noting the similarities of the American texts to those from abroad. The prominent feature of literature that deals with terrorism in the post-9/11 world is that the texts confront the media spectacle of terrorism by focusing on the spectacle’s impact on individual lives. The writers I focus upon are emblematic of this confrontation with the media spectacle of terrorism.

The corporate news media and the genre of infotainment constructed to garner mass appeal is the primary outlet for the distribution of the spectacle of terrorism in the wake of 9/11. I foreground the corporate news media in order to highlight how, according to James Lull, the “mass media plays a vital role in the dissemination of

ideologies” (14). Corporate news conveys set ideas about terrorism to the public as much as it provides information on the subject, and in the profit driven world of the contemporary media the impetus for the ideas is based on what will garner the largest audience, not on ethical coverage of a situation. In the infotainment environment, the ideas pertain to drama and fear, thus focusing newscasts on developing villains and presenting drastic possibilities for the future. Both convey the idea of the evil of terrorism without engaging the relevant information that would lead to informed understanding of the subject. Furthermore, the interconnected nature of global communication and the increasing speed with which images travel across global networks means that the American corporate news has the ability to reach a worldwide audience instantaneously. The American media industry has the uncensored ability to reach global audiences. With this vast audience and mass appeal comes a responsibility that is not always considered in the immediacy of a situation the corporate media wants to report. The ethics of the ideas conveyed to this broad audience through the visual representations and accompanying commentary are not always fully considered. Media outlets tend to lean more toward speed than they do careful consideration of the subject matter, a strategy that favors the spectacle of terrorism. The spectacle forecloses terrorism by presenting a unified version of the act and characterizing it for the public based on prevailing sentiment. The corporate media uses this to its advantage in order to draw the largest audience possible. Instead of disputing the prevailing ideas or presenting contradictory information, it plays into public opinion to draw the largest possible audience. Giving way to public opinion amounts to an easier exchange than

disputing popular sentiment in a democratic society. This strategy effectively forecloses terrorism by closing out alternative opinions and limiting the information presented. The profit motive, thus, inhibits the free exchange of ideas and forecloses the discussion of terrorism.

9/11 produced a shift in the representation of terrorism by the news media. Not only did it usher in the popularity of an item like the crawl at the bottom of the screen, something Lynn Sharon Schwartz presents in her novel, but in the format of the news coverage. The attacks on September 11 captured such an audience for the news media that the bar was set even higher in its aftermath to capture greater market share. The definitive evil was set-up to be terrorism, and the perpetrators were raised to the status of super-villains on the world stage. Bridgette Nacos explains how this elevated the persona of the terrorists to that of world leader and gave them a political role in geopolitics.⁶ The characterization of the terrorists represents the corporate news media's ability to characterize a situation by presenting images in a certain way and accompanying footage with expert testimony that defines the subject matter as much as it informs the public. With no definitive check on the media, its ability to define and construct personas goes on unfettered.

Alternative forms of media that have come to prominence with new technology attempt to perform a check and balance on the corporate news media. Independent media voices from various sources provide alternatives to the mainstream but have not matched

⁶ After 9/11 and the airing of a tape by Osama Bin Laden, Nacos compares representations of President George Bush and Osama Bin Laden in the news media, arguing that the comparison amounts to an elevation of the status of the terrorist (57).

the influence of the larger corporate outlets. They exist on smaller cable networks and/or websites. These sources perform an important task, but their influence pales in comparison to the combined voice of the corporate media. Furthermore, blogs, email, and personal video have changed the way the corporate news media goes about its business. Most successful blogs exist separate from the larger media outlets. However, the corporate media have their own blogs in order to break into this market space. The news programs also incorporate blogs, email, and video in order to draw them back into the corporate media's purview by acknowledging their existence and arguing either with or against the content. Much in the way that metafiction functions, the corporate media performs a type of self-awareness that effectively subordinates blogs to the newscast by demonstrating an awareness of blogs and how they influence the corporate news.

My goal is not to construct an opposition between the corporate media in general and literature as a whole. However, I do argue that the segments within these two genres are performing at odds with each other when it comes to representations of terrorism. In this dissertation, my argument is limited very specifically to the representation of terrorism in mainstream, profit-based, television news programming, a genre I refer to as infotainment. I argue, following Brigitte Nacos and others, that terrorist acts make a particular claim on this genre of media coverage and that claim is met by journalism to remarkable and unquestioning degree. In other words, terror depends on wide-spread public representation and equally, such representations present possibilities for profit in corporate journalism. The synergy between the two leads to specific modes of serial, sensationalist, and spectacular mediation that is largely unquestioned. While other forms

of television journalism proffer widely varied means and modes, the representation of terror is remarkably unified, singular in its ideological and representational implications. According to Michael Schudson, 9/11 presented a unique situation where journalists empathized with the public rather than remained unbiased, presenting a sympathetic account of the tragedy along the lines of popular sentiment (188). The effect was a redoubling of popular ideas and the disavowal of alternative discourses that played into the spectacle of terrorism by presenting a single, unquestioned discourse on the tragedy.

I take issue with the way terrorism has become entertainment on the 24-hour news networks. I criticize how the unity of voices that surrounds the topic codifies the ideas of terrorism for the general public in a way that cuts off other understandings and limits our critical engagement. Literature mimics the genre of terrorist media spectacle to open the genre to new points of view that shed more light on how individuals deal with and respond to terrorism from a variety of positions. Furthermore, literature allows for an examination of the media spectacle of terrorism on the lives of individuals from around the world. I argue that literature encourages more ethical responses that consider the effects on diverse groups of people.

By its very nature, terrorism presents a unique set of circumstances to the corporate news media. Many of the goals of terrorists—to instill fear in a civilian population, to create awareness for a political cause, to reach as large an audience as possible—coincide with how the corporate media functions. Each depends on widespread communication networks and relies upon dramatic images to relate a message. The corporate media, therefore, unwittingly carries out the terrorists' goals. This fact

does not mean that media outlets should not cover terrorism, but it does call for more responsible coverage that maintains an ethical awareness when covering terror acts. Furthermore, no set definition of terrorism exists, as I discuss in Chapter II, so the news media reasserts a totalized definition each time it uses the word terrorism to describe an event, implicitly by example and description. Instead of accounting for the disagreements over what terrorism means, the corporate media adopts prevailing perspectives that circulate in mainstream culture and enact a foreclosure of the term. In the case of terrorism, the corporate media forecloses the subject by treating it as a grand narrative by relying upon a single, unified definition that closes off any confusion or gap in knowledge and unifies the experience by filling in a prescribed meaning.

Postmodernism, according to Jean Francois Lyotard, breaks with grand narratives and postmodern art accounts for unrepresentable aspects that “obstruct the formation and stabilization” of meaning (*Postmodern Explained* 11). The corporate media formulates a grand narrative of terrorism in relation to 9/11 by foreclosing all acts of terror under the meanings derived from the World Trade Center attacks. On the other hand, literature accounts for these unrepresentable aspects making it a better means of representing terrorism, which by its very nature has no single definition.

Terrorism draws attention through its dramatic and shocking nature, being something akin to Hollywood movies instead of everyday news. Therefore, it naturally creates a curiosity and a desire to know in an audience through its dramatic footage and human drama. The fascination with terrorism derives from both its perpetrators who carry out unthinkable acts, sacrificing themselves for a cause, and the victims who

experience unimaginable horror and evoke empathy in the onlooker. Furthermore, terrorism presents a dilemma to corporate news organizations due to the shared goal of attracting the largest audience that exists for both terrorists and the corporate media. Nobody will deny the need for news to be presented to the public, and news of terrorism is of vital importance to the population effected. The corporate media plays a vital role in the dissemination of information. However, it there is a tendency when news media run unchecked for infotainment to participate unquestioningly in the unified production of ideology, of grand narratives that support only one possible course of political action. Without careful consideration of the footage presented on television newscasts, terrorists can use the corporate media to its own advantage.

Terrorism exists as a spectacle, and as best seen on 9/11, is set up to be a media spectacle. Analysts and terrorists alike have admitted that the targets were chosen on September 11 for maximum media exposure, among other reasons. The terrorists attempted to create a media spectacle that would shock the world and be carried to a global audience. They achieved their goal because it coincided with the corporate media's purpose of attracting audience. In defense of the news media, they play a vital role in providing the public with information. However, the corporate media can go too far quickly, as it did with the wall to wall coverage of 9/11, and feed the spectacle of terrorism by putting it directly in front of a willing audience for days on end. The effect on 9/11 was that the spectacle of terrorism burned into the psyche of the public, and terrorism was defined for a shocked public, foreclosed by the corporate media that performed exactly as the terrorists wanted.

I am not suggesting that the corporate media purposely carries out the foreclosure of terrorism and the perpetuation of the spectacle. However, the medium of television news formulates the same type of spectacle. Marshall McLuhan's famous statement in *Understanding Media*, "The medium is the message," posits the notion that it is not the ideas broadcast as much as the form of the medium that influences society (7).

McLuhan's argument explains how the television becomes a cultural industry producing a way of life and a mode of thought. The television provides a "visual stress on continuity, uniformity, and connectedness" and "confronts us with the great technological means of implementing continuity and lineality by fragmented repetition" (364). Thus, the broadcast media construct the spectacle by unifying thought around a single idea that conforms to societal norms. The form of the broadcast allows for simple norms proffered by the media to become dominant and effectively subjugate the public.

Literature provides a unique engagement with the media spectacle of terrorism simply by shifting the medium through which an audience views the aftermath of a terrorist act. Literature carries out a sustained examination able to appropriate the aesthetics of the media spectacle and the genre of infotainment that is the most prominent purveyor of the spectacle in order to create individual confrontations. The structures of the corporate media bleed over into literary texts, forming a confrontation with the foreclosure those forms indicate. The literature examined in this dissertation both demonstrates the foreclosure and posits individual reactions that open gaps and find new meanings in the aftermath of terrorism. Novels amount to sustained engagements

that create a confrontation with the corporate media, shifting sensibilities away from the normative into more complex understandings.

In order to form this confrontation, the literature I examine deconstructs the spectacle form of the corporate media by questioning its methods and by forestalling unthinking or immediate recognition to open a place for creative engagement, for questioning. The texts open gaps in the foreclosure of meaning by offering diverse readings of the way terrorism manifests itself in the form of the spectacle that do not easily fit the media's mold, yet work for those involved, creating an ethical engagement with terrorism based on diverse perspectives. Derek Attridge calls this confrontation the "singularity" of the literary text, a work that engages with the other, the enemy, the terrorist, the unknown person (136). This "singularity" allows for new possibilities to emerge through the engagement with previously unrecognized subjects that takes place in certain texts and builds an understanding about the way people are subjugated by, in this case, the corporate media. Building understandings of others allows for meanings to be re-shaped around personal experience and diverse voices rather than the unifying effect of the spectacle.

I focus upon the questions and absences of the literary text in order to observe how the texts act in fidelity to the events and allow manifest understandings to take shape over time by considering diverse perspectives. Australian novelist Janette Turner Hospital writes in *The Last Magician*: "Absence is potent, unanswerable questions are the ones that engage us, the silences are thick with story" (80). Removing this quote from the context of the novel, I use it as a lesson in how literature ethically engages its

subject matter. By paying attention to the questions each text asks instead of focusing on finding answers, we enable responses not only from the writer, but from the reader as well. The gaps in the text—gaps that leave the questions unanswered and allow for absence to become salient—these gaps perform in the exact opposite way as the corporate news media. It allows for understanding to come out of the confusion that any terrorist act creates, over time instead of giving in to the immediacy the contemporary world demands. Novels avoid the rush to judgment by questioning and acknowledging the lack of understanding in certain places, something the corporate media could learn from literature. Furthermore, literature is dialogic by nature, presenting multiple perspectives and a more holistic view of a difficult topic by carrying on a continuous dialogue relating to discourses outside of the text.⁷ The diverse perspectives provide alternative understandings and the realization that multiple understandings exist. Any attempt to define terrorism needs to proceed with this understanding in mind, and literature provides a portrayal of the differences whether it be from the standpoint of a perpetrator or victim, or the different standpoints that varied geographic locations and nationalities maintain. I structure the chapters of this dissertation in order to maintain these differences and observe how they take shape through different voices.

The unanswerable questions and the singular, ethical engagement with the text lead to what Alain Badiou calls *fidelity to an event*, which literature enacts in contrast to

⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin in the *Dialogic Imagination* describes dialogic by explaining how the “way in which the word conceives its object is complicated by a dialogic interaction within the object between various aspects of its socio-verbal intelligibility. And an artistic representation, an ‘image’ of the object, may be penetrated by this dialogic play of verbal intentions that meet and are interwoven in it” (277).

the media spectacle of terrorism. In *Being and Event*, Badiou describes fidelity as a process of being faithful to the multiple nature of any event and allowing the pieces to take shape over time, keeping the event open as meanings take shape. I pose this process against the unity of the media spectacle that forecloses meaning through quick consensus and without consideration of multiple aspects. Literature enacts this process through its sustained engagements, its dialogic nature, and its questioning of events that maintain openings instead of foreclosing. This process is highlighted in both the literature and theory in the following chapters.

The next chapter builds a theoretical framework for both understanding the *spectacle of infotainment* and how literature responds in an ethical manner. I work forward from Guy Debord's ideas in *The Society of the Spectacle* to examine how terrorism, as portrayed by the corporate media, becomes a media spectacle. The contemporary news genre has turned into *infotainment*, a mixed medium that provides information while maintaining a primary goal of entertaining its audience. The entertainment factor, driven mainly by ratings, creates spectacles using dramatic images, computer graphics, and speculative commentary to draw and keep the audience. The presentation effectively forecloses the meaning of the terrorist act portrayed on the news and cuts off response in favor of the unified meaning put forth by the corporate media. I link response to ethics in order to show how the infotainment genre constructs unethical representations that simply carry out the terrorists' goals for them. In contrast, literature provides an engagement that opens up the foreclosure of meaning and allows for ethical responses to terrorism in a post-9/11 environment.

Chapter III examines global texts that directly confront the foreclosure of the corporate media by showing how the spectacle functions. Each text employs the exceptional nature of the spectacle, in which it becomes the norm by being an extreme that exists both within society and outside it at the same time. The texts engage this idea from diverse viewpoints in order to respond to the foreclosure. In *The Unknown Terrorist*, Australian writer Richard Flanagan portrays the effects of the media making a spectacle out of one woman and treating her as a terrorist threat to normal life in Sydney. Ian McEwan's *Saturday* turns a war protest into a spectacle that forms the background for a day in the life of one man that experiences his own terrorist incident. Moshin Hamid confronts the existing stereotypes created by the spectacle that allow western society to see a Muslim man as a terrorist in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.

Chapter IV shifts to examine American texts that confront the media spectacle. The texts each form a distinct confrontation with the corporate media's portrayal of 9/11 to both show what shape the American reaction to the tragedy has taken due to the spectacular images that came out of the terrorist attack and open new ways of responding to the tragedy. The texts each show how the corporate media constructs a unified narrative that forms a communal discourse from which people then withdraw by retreating to domestic life and focusing on personal issues to escape. *110 Stories* offers fragmented literary reactions from New York writers that attempt to respond by dealing with the corporate media directly. Lynne Sharon Schwartz focuses on the domestic life of one woman who attempts to build new meanings out of the tragedy but is constantly hindered by the media spectacle. *The Terrorist* amounts to John Updike's appropriation

of the corporate media's discourse in order to reinstitute the heroic and virile role of the middle class white American male. Lastly, Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* posits the idea of treating art as an event that provides a new way to deal with tragedy. Each of these texts reshape the American landscape by providing new possibilities for responding to the tragedy that reshaped the skyline of New York and the U.S.

The texts in these chapters provide broad perspectives from a variety of geographic locations. I am attempting to put international writers from a variety of geographic locations in conversation with the American writers who experienced 9/11 on home soil. The different groups examine the media spectacle of terrorism in different ways that lead to the same end, a questioning of the unity of the spectacle and the challenge offered by individual voices. I chose the particular texts for the distinct questions each asks of the corporate media. Each amounts to a unique response to the media spectacle that opens the possibility for the reader to respond, or in Kelly Oliver's terminology, be response-able by opening a space for individual responses to terrorism in 9/11's aftermath. It is unclear at this point whether literary writers can open the foreclosure and alter the shape of representations of 9/11 and other terrorist acts in the future. Only time can determine this effect, but the observation of what writers are doing demonstrates the importance of the corporate media's influence on the audience, especially when it comes to terrorism.

What follows derives primarily from the realization that is emerging from writers' responses to terrorism in a post-9/11 environment: they must open holes in the media's foreclosure of terrorism in order to respond ethically. The critical theory

examines the terms under which this foreclosure takes places, and the literature confronts the validity of those terms for moving forward. The literature asks questions without seeking answers in order to move forward by finding meaning in the process, not the result. It deterritorializes terrorism from its embedded position within the media spectacle and opens it up to new responses that allow individuals to come to terms with tragedy and work through trauma.

CHAPTER II

FROM SPECTACLE TO RESPONSE

During the evening of April 23, 2000, terrorists interrupted the tranquility of a small diving resort on the Malaysian island of Sipadan.⁸ They arrived in boats similar to outrigger canoes but larger and affixed with motors. Twenty-three tourists and hotel workers were kidnapped, transported by sea to the Philippine island of Jolo where they remained in various camps until their release, moved frequently while negotiations took place between the terrorists and government officials. The group of hostages hailed from Germany, France, Finland, South Africa, Lebanon, and Malaysia, thus ensuring international media coverage from a wide range of sources. The terrorists were part of the Abu Sayaf organization, an Islamic group whose actions focused on the goal of securing autonomy for the Muslim population of the Philippines, concentrated primarily on the island of Mindanao. The group's activities centered on highly publicized kidnappings that served the goals of earning money through ransom and obtaining maximum publicity.⁹ They relied upon a strategic media campaign to achieve the latter

⁸ The details of the account come from Dirk Barreveld's analysis of the incident in *Terrorism in the Philippines*. I turn to a discussion of this particular incident instead of 9/11 to give an account of a situation that is not foreclosed for the American audience. The Sidipan kidnappings played out to a much greater degree in the European press. While still garnering attention in the U.S. media, the ordeal goes largely forgotten today and provides an excellent example of how the media spectacle forecloses a terrorist situation that is not colored by personal experiences in this country.

⁹ Walter Laquer explains that Abu Sayaf used kidnappings because they supplied money, as opposed to other terrorist activities that garnered attention but did not bring in

goal, allowing various news agencies and documentary filmmakers into their camps to highlight their activities.

The Sipadan hostage taking was a strategic success, as the international news media made a world-wide television spectacle out of the crisis. The terrorists began by inviting in a Filipina Muslim with a video camera to ask simple questions of the hostages. The hostages responded to the questions because they believed any outside attention would help bring a resolution to the situation.¹⁰ But this was only the beginning of what would become, according to Dirk Barreveld, a “media circus” (163). German, French, Finnish, Israeli, and other media crews from around the world were allowed access to the hostages, compiling an enormous amount of footage and interviews that played in the global media on a daily basis. One crew loaned the hostages a camera with which they were allowed to document their own plight in captivity. According to Barreveld, the international reporters “inform[ed] the hostages about the huge publicity their hostage ha[d] caused in many European countries. Abu Sayyaf made streaming headlines!” (162). Barreveld’s emphasis on publicity highlights how the media played into the terrorist’s goal of commandeering the headlines. The notoriety gave Abu Sayyaf the leverage they sought to pressure the Philippine government into giving regional autonomy and millions in ransom that provided guns and supplies to further the terrorists’ goals.

revenue. He further explains that Abu Sayaf was a small group with a large impact due to its media strategies, “What it lacked in numbers it compensated for with hectic activity and public relations” (204).

¹⁰ Dirk Barreveld explains that the hostages were “taking the visit in a positive way; at least there is attention from the outside world” (199).

The media *spectacle* makes the incident into a reality television episode, which challenges the boundary between news and entertainment.¹¹ Brigitte Nacos describes the scenes on German TV that played out daily and amounted to a serial drama recounting the misery of the captives.¹² From infections that threatened the lives of some of the hostages to suicidal impulses, the human drama proved to be more gripping than fiction. Nacos describes how news became a hit show in Germany in the summer of 2000, “fitting right into the then quite new ‘reality’ genre of television. Providing far more drama, suspense, and human interest than *Survivor* or *Big Brother*, this reality show was offered, in one version or another, on literally all of Germany’s television and radio channels and in the print media as well” (86). The exotic setting, constant suffering, and ubiquitous coverage made the drama unfold like a movie.¹³ Reporters who went inside the camp were interviewed upon their return, becoming characters in the drama.¹⁴ The television and print media commented on the hostages and assessed their actions as if they were stars on screen.¹⁵ The ethics of showing the plight of the hostages was never

¹¹ I use the term *spectacle* in the sense of Guy Debord’s term, as he defines it in *The Society of the Spectacle*. It will be discussed at length below, but mainly it amounts to a mechanism of foreclosure.

¹² In *Mass Mediated Terrorism*, she describes her own experience watching the drama unfold on German television.

¹³ A BBC correspondent compared the drama to the American movie *The Blair Witch Project*, in its documentary-style footage (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/from_our_own_correspondent/746215.stm).

¹⁴ An Associated Press reporter was interviewed about the conditions of the camp, treatment of the hostages, and the presence of terrorists by the BBC (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/741892.stm>).

¹⁵ Nacos provides examples of how articles criticized the hostages for their actions both during and after the affair. The mother of the family of German hostages was criticized for leaving her husband and son behind when she was released for needed medical

questioned. Media outlets justified the footage by the ratings it received and the audience's need to know, a rationalization that puts the public's right to information ahead of the ethics of representing the situation. Nacos explains how "the lines between news and entertainment were often blurred," and she subsequently questions the values of the corporate media and what makes a story important and worth coverage (86).¹⁶

"Even for the hostages, who had been forced to play starring roles in the terrorism show and had sometimes courted and sometimes cursed the intrusive media, real life seemed, in the end, like fiction – a movie" (86). Reality was a simulacrum produced by a fiction that seemed more real than reality, and the hostages relied on movies to provide the context for their situation, since nothing in their personal experiences provided the context needed to comprehend their ordeal. Back in Europe, public interest in the hostages forced governments to negotiate.¹⁷ The ransom in the sum of over twenty-five million U.S. dollars was paid out, proving that terrorism pays.¹⁸ The coverage played into the success of the kidnappings for the terrorists as it created a spectacular view of terrorism that overtook the actual event and dictated responses to it.

attention. The son of the family was subsequently ridiculed for signing an exclusive rights deal with a marketing company.

¹⁶ I refer to the corporate media to draw attention to the profit motive in the contemporary news world. The television and newspaper markets have become increasingly competitive to the point where the drive for ratings links to the profit motive to change what is seen on TV. Douglas Kellner discusses the corporate media extensively in *Media Spectacle and the Crisis of Democracy*. David Croteau and William Hoynes explore the corporate element of the media explicitly in *The Business of the Media: Corporate Media and the Public Interest*. More discussion of this idea takes place later in the chapter.

¹⁷ Nacos makes the link between public interest and terrorist demands and argues that the coverage led to the paying of ransom. It shows how publicity effectively helps terrorism meet its goals.

¹⁸ The exact figure is not known, but Barreveld estimates it to be over this amount (169).

The media spectacle surrounding the kidnappings effectively *foreclosed* the argument regarding how to respond to the crisis. Just as a bank ends the lending agreement of a borrower who cannot pay, foreclosure refers to ceasing the dialogue that attempts to come to terms with the diverse articulations of a concept or situation in favor of the hegemonic discourse that defines it once and for all. It covers over the *aporia*, “an indication of real or pretended doubt” that “signifies the breakdown of immediate or accessible meaning,” according to Marian Eide, instituted at any moment that defies explanation, terrorism being one such moment (30). Foreclosure forces a definition onto a subject that forces doubts aside and dispenses with unexplainable elements in favor of an easily codified meaning. It also takes away ideas of complexity and multiplicity so that the significance of something is always attached to a single meaning.¹⁹ Foreclosure follows the logic of what political theorists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe call the “*hegemonic relation*,” “by which a certain particularity assumes the representation of a universality entirely incommensurable with it” (xiii). The singular subject matter, which by its very nature contains multiple meanings, is subsumed under the banner of a universal signifier that fills in its definition. Foreclosure fills in any absence of meaning and ties the significance to a name that hides the multiple parts under a single designation. It relies upon a normative discourse, one that seems natural based on existing beliefs, with which people feel comfortable to relate a distinct meaning.²⁰ The

¹⁹ I am referring here to how foreclosure denies what Rosi Braidotti calls “complex knowing” that embodies the multiple and hybrid nature of all subjects (101).

²⁰ Barbara Hernstein Smith explains how ideas that go against the norm cause a sense of discomfort. They cause “forms of bodily distress that occur when one’s ingrained, taken-for-granted sense of how certain things are – and thus presumably will be an in some

link to the normative allows foreclosure to escape interrogation and close off discourse. It consumes its subject matter by creating an indelible link. In the case of the Sipadan hostages, the media spectacle overtook the political dialogue by creating personalities with which the audience empathized and establishing a link through the fear European viewers felt for the hostages. The dramatic scenes relayed such fear that no other articulation of the situation could break through and resulted in public pressure on political leaders to resolve the ordeal, defining terrorism through fear and foreclosing its discussion.

In this chapter, I argue that the spectacle forecloses terrorism, cutting off critical engagement by allowing fear to dictate reactions, and I suggest that a theory of the *event*, as introduced by Alain Badiou and others, can open the foreclosure and enable ethical responses. The media spectacle of terrorism forecloses its subject matter by filling in any and all absence with expert testimony that ultimately provokes fear where any uncertainty remained. I do so by focusing on the blurred genre between entertainment and information that perpetuates fear and carries out the terrorist's goal for them. I attempt to reopen the essential absence, to find the productive possibility in uncertainty, experienced in traumatic events that allows for critical examination over time and meaning to be formulated based on careful consideration. I first examine how the infotainment genre embodies the spectacle of terrorism and proves to be the norm for covering terrorist events. I investigate infotainment by examining the confluence of capitalism and media that creates spectacles out of events. Second, I argue that the

sense *should* be – is suddenly or insistently confronted by something very much at odds with it” (xiv).

spectacle forecloses response by perpetuating a vicarious trauma that inhibits authentic reactions and fails to adequately articulate the matter. Third, I argue that terrorism needs to be seen as an event in order to discern the nuances and engage with tragedy in a meaningful way that allows subjects to witness and respond. The argument culminates with a discussion of how literature provides the means to engage the media spectacle of terrorism and respond to it by examining terrorist events.

I use the term *event* to mean a singular occurrence that interrupts the manifest understandings formed from the ideological and predetermined way people view particular issues.²¹ An event forms a break with routine and initiates a new vantage point from which to realize what something means. Literary critic Bill Readings explains, “An event is an occurrence, as such...the event is the fact or case that something happens, after which nothing will ever be the same again. The event disrupts any pre-existing referential frame within which it might be represented or understood” (xxxix). It ruptures how one understands an issue and brings about new questions and possibilities that realize their singular nature. Australian philosopher James Williams describes how the “event must be thought of primarily as an occurrence at the level of the virtual – as something that resists identification and not the actual. The event is a relation between actualities” (74). The event occurs in a real space that challenges representations that identify it in a particular way. Instead, it must be envisioned through the connections between the elements that make up the event and those the individual brings to bear on

²¹ I am adhering to the particular conception of an event that has come to prominence in contemporary philosophy through the work of Gilles Deleuze, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Isabelle Stengers, and most explicitly, Alain Badiou. Critical theorists and literary critics have expanded on the work of these philosophers to apply the event to different areas.

the situation. In an interview, Michel Foucault even turns his thinking toward the event and constructs a method he calls “eventualization” around this mode of thought. He argues that “‘eventualization’ thus works by constructing around the singular event analysed as process a ‘polygon’ or rather a ‘polyhedron’ of intelligibility, the number of whose faces is not given in advance and can never properly be taken as finite” (278). The method allows for a fluid understanding to what will constitute the event by allowing for its changing face over time. The process calls for sustained investigation into the event and the openness that accounts for the multiplicities contained within it, acknowledging that there will always be more to come.

Theorists from diverse fields have explored art’s potential to be an event. In both her work and theory, photographer Yve Lomax explores how even a photograph can be an event. She argues that “an event is the act or process of something ‘in the making’, which can also be the process of something becoming undone” (22). She posits the dual actions of the event as both unmaking and initiating new understandings that are considerate of how meaning is a process, not a fixed state. Literary critic Derek Attridge investigates the potential for literature to act as an event. He argues that it is a particular experience “*as an event*, an event which opens new possibilities of meaning and feeling” that literature provides (59). He brings to the fore the affective elements of an event to demonstrate individuated responses when faced with a set of circumstances that one has

not previously experienced. For Attridge, literature produces this type of engagement, and he initiates the discussion of how literature can be a singular event.²²

The infotainment genre has come to prominence in the coverage of terrorism and popularity suggests that informational value does not necessarily ensure that something will gain priority in the corporate media, that entertainment now has a place in the corporate news business. The corporate media is like any other corporation that has an obligation to shareholders and works with a profit motive in mind. However, the corporate media have a competing political and cultural role that at times can be at odds with the profit motive. Sociologists David Croteau and William Hoynes explain how the situation causes “a great dilemma in assessing the changing business of media and its significance for democratic societies. Which of these yardsticks – profits or public interest – should we use in measuring media’s performance?” (1). As exemplified by the infotainment genre, the trend has been against public interest and for more and more dynamic news stories that draw larger audiences. Furthermore, media critic Els De Bens argues how “The market model has been increasingly gaining importance and profit-making has become the central preoccupation of media companies and organizations” (11). It has forced news broadcasts to take on new formats that excite the public rather

²² Andrew Gibson further pursues this theme when he examines “the extent to which a postmodern or post-Levinasian ethics of the novel might be an ethics of the event” (134). This as well as the ideas of Attridge will be further drawn out in the end of this chapter.

than serve the public.²³ It has caused lower standards in the industry and pushed content control into the hands of executives who make solitary decisions regarding content.²⁴

Narrative's power to garner attention in a serial form has overtaken the political and informational needs of the public. Terrorism provides such a storyline that consistently draws attention and brings viewers back. By creating spectacles through representational practices, the corporate media effectively participates in the foreclosure of terrorism, closing off critical discourse by rendering it immediately contentless and then proceeding to fill in the meaning by means of a single, unified voice.²⁵ Infotainment fails to engage the political significance of terrorism in lieu of speculating about drastic possibilities and the identity of villains in order to create storylines viewers can follow.²⁶ It produces a shallow view of terrorism that consistently provokes fear, labeling terrorism as a threat to people's lives and forcing it to remain confined to that narrow condition. The meaning of terrorism is categorically defined in the process, closing off

²³ Citing examples of European public news outlets, De Bens explains how "competition forced the public broadcasters to innovate and to strive for more autonomy, more dynamism, less politicization, new programmes, and different formats" (10).

²⁴ Tom Fenton explains how standards have decreased and the impact of executive control over content has lowered the quality of the information the corporate news presents. He argues that networks have realized it is "Much easier to feed them brain candy" than provide investigative journalism to an audience (21).

²⁵ It takes the content by means of creating images that fill in for the meaning of a terrorist act. People refer to the image instead of discuss the definition and nuance of what occurred. It stems from the argument of Jacques Ranciere who proposes, "if there is nothing but images, there is nothing other than the image. And if there is nothing other than the image, the very notion of the image becomes devoid of content" (1). The image supports itself without content when it becomes the only reference point as it does in the spectacle.

²⁶ Brigitte Nacos explains how these factors lead journalists to describe themselves as "merchants of fear" that influence public sentiment rather than explain the full story (66).

critical engagement. This foreclosure defines without fully examining an event's repercussions or the divergent viewpoints of those involved and amounts to a spectacle that constructs a unified discourse regarding terror and fear.²⁷

My ethical approach, drawing on the work of Kelly Oliver and Emmanuel Levinas, recognizes the humanity inside of the devastation incurred in a terrorist attack. An ethical response witnesses the humanity of all of terrorism's actors even when some carry out the most devastating of actions and allows for responses from informed viewpoints, as opposed to those that are foreclosed. This process amounts to an engagement with the spectacle that literature focusing on terrorism and its aftermath provides, allowing individuals to respond, or in Oliver's words, become response-able. Oliver proposes a process of witnessing to confront the corporate media images that acts as an opening into the subject. In *Women as Weapons of War*, she calls this form of witnessing "a process of perpetual questioning and interpretation rather than dogmatic closure" (103). Along these lines, I lay out the theoretical underpinnings for examining how texts resist traditional narrative closure to open gaps in otherwise codified meanings in order to enable the needed recognition and response that is ethical engagement. As opposed to traditional literary closure, which could be seen as foreclosing the meaning of an event by resolving the situation in the end of a text, the literature on which I focus maintains openings and reinstitutes gaps to confront the foreclosure of the media spectacle.

²⁷ I am using Guy Debord's idea of the spectacle that he puts forth in *The Society of the Spectacle*. One of the main characteristics of the spectacle is that it unifies disparate elements of a situation in order to construct a single narrative or idea that defines the circumstance.

Research on terrorism often begins with assumptions of the inability to adequately define terrorism and throwing off the simple definitions that foreclose the topic in public. Researchers even contradict themselves by formulating a definition no matter how divergent from other ideas or particularistic to their own point of view it may be, but the definition only amounts to one among many. The practice leads to a wide range of definitions produced by scholars, government agencies, and the media, among others. The various entities only prove one thing with their varied definitions: the complexity of terrorism and the inability to foreclose it in any meaningful way. All of the foreclosures amount to forcing a name on something that essentially cannot be named except by a witness. Many argue that formulating a single definition is not only impossible but furthers the confusion regarding the subject. Bruce Hoffman explains that the “effect of this proclivity towards equivocation is that today there is no one widely accepted or agreed definition for terrorism. Different departments or agencies of even the same government will themselves often have different definitions for terrorism” (38). This confusion leads some to say that terrorism is any act of violence committed to instill fear, while others insist on the political nature of terrorism, that violence must have a political goal in mind to be considered terrorism. Still other commentators categorize terrorism based on the purpose of the act. Michael Ignatieff lists six categories based on the political objective of the terrorists, each necessitating a unique response dependent upon the goal of the violence (83).²⁸ While useful for determining

²⁸ The six are “insurrectionary terrorism aimed at revolutionary overthrow of a state/loner or issue terrorism, aimed at promotion of a single cause/liberation terrorism, aimed at the overthrow of a colonial regime/separatist terrorism, aiming at independence

motives, the system seems to imply that all terrorism has a political mandate and that the perpetrators determine what that involves. If true, then understanding the act of terror depends solely upon the motivations of the terrorist, an oversimplification of a complex contemporary issue that gives too much power to the perpetrator. The attempts to define terrorism each fail because they attempt to unify a topic that by its very nature exists in various forms.

A better understanding of terrorism derives from acknowledging that its multiple and subjective nature makes it impossible to confine in any single definition or category. Walter Laqueur begins his research with the understanding that “[t]here is no authoritative systematic guide to terrorism ... and perhaps there never will be one, simply because there is not one terrorism but a variety of terrorisms and what is true for one does not necessarily apply to others” (8). This acknowledgement creates certain obstacles to the study of terrorism, but it also allows for a more nuanced investigation open to considering diverse elements. Furthermore, when terrorism is primarily defined as a violent political act, as is often the case, the ethical and traumatic elements lose significance. In the case of the Sipidan hostages, if the media had focused solely on the politics of the act, the human drama would have been lost and no consideration for the hostages would have played into the outcome. Instead, the human drama of the hostages was well documented and their saga heavily influenced the outcome of the situation. The victims of terror must be factored into any understanding of terrorism. Categorical

for a subordinate ethnic or religious group within a state/occupation terrorism, aimed at driving an occupying force from territory acquired through war or conquest/global terrorism, aimed not at the liberation of a particular group, but at inflicting damage and humiliation on a global power” (83).

analysis fails to consider these facets of terrorism and therefore fails to engage with critical aspects that could lead to a broader range of insights.

Moving away from the categorical clears the path for an axiomatic critique of terrorism that considers elements of the terrorist act that are often overlooked. However, axiomatic critique, an investigation that relies on a consideration of the self-evident instead of the application of a theoretical rubric, may prove problematic due to the often ambiguous and illogical nature of the terrorist event.²⁹ The speed of the media, the gap trauma leaves in memory, and attempts to capitalize politically on terrorism all prevent us from seeing the terrorist act for what it is, vague, subjective, traumatic, and so on.³⁰ It takes an open mind to consider and come to terms with the possible motives behind any violent act, let alone terrorism, which often can seem so far outside the realm of possibility that it avoids comprehension. Robert Goodin argues that this lack of understanding presents the single greatest problem with terrorism for those attempting to discern its repercussions, that it “circumvents people’s reasoning capacity” (158). Thus, terrorism throws the possibility of an axiomatic critique or anything that relies on the self-evident into question. Here lies the problem that artistic representations of terrorism must deal with: how do we recognize what lies beyond recognition? I take this question one step further to ask, how do we ethically engage a terrorist event? If research desires to engage terrorism on a productive level and work through the repercussions, some sort

²⁹ Badiou describes how “an axiomatic presentation consists, on the basis of non-defined terms” (*Being and Event* 29). It is self-evident presentation that avoids being swept up into a simple definition and allows the viewer to see the different terms for what they are, not subsumed under a single name.

³⁰ It can seem random if nobody takes responsibility.

of ethical response that breaches the foreclosures that cultural industries, the corporate media, invoke is needed. Furthermore, the media spectacle prevents an authentic view of a terrorist act, and people need an alternative way of viewing these situations in order to be able to ethically respond to terrorism.

Literary critics Alex Houen and Margaret Scanlan have both examined literature's relationship with terrorism. In *Terrorism and Modern Literature*, Alex Houen historicizes the narrative relationship going back as far as Joseph Conrad and focusing primarily on modernist literature. He argues that terrorism exists primarily as a discursive construct, violence as a means of sending a message. He explains that "producing a narrative or theory that outlines an aetiology of terrorism and accounts for its effects is obviously a form of counterterror in itself" (11). His research argues for literature's efficacy in the fight against terrorism by being a study of the causes and showing its effect on individuals.³¹ Margaret Scanlan's *Plotting Terror* examines how writers maintain a romantic notion of their own political influence, especially in their confrontation with terrorism. "Terrorism is both actual killing and a fictional construct," she explains, and "fiction embodies an acute critique of the power of discourse as opposed to the power of the individual's self-assertion" (2). Like Houen, Scanlan examines the role of the writer as it is depicted in texts through either a metafictional narrative or writer-figures that confront terrorism. Scanlan argues that the media's increasing influence is damaging the ability of the artist to affect public opinion, but due

³¹ Published in 2002, it is likely that very little of the content was written after the events of 9/11; only the introduction references the tragedy. Subsequent chapters were clearly written years before publication.

to terrorism's unique position as both actual violence and political spectacle, it poses a unique discursive challenge to the writer. Writers, thus, have the ability to intervene due to the novel's inherent ability to oppose the unified assertion of power terrorism and the media put forth. Each of these texts argues the efficacy of fiction but stops short of figuring how they engage with various aspects of terrorism.

Cultural critics suggest the need for textual intervention to influence both the corporate media and terrorism. Marshal McLuhan discusses the balancing effect text has on television: "To resist TV, therefore, one must acquire the antidote of related media like print" (359). Instead of the brief encounters with a subject matter tied to quick images, print provides extended engagements without the distraction of moving images. Print also enables the reader to control the duration and extent of the engagement with the subject matter, instead of television, where commercial breaks and the drive for ratings determine how long a story will be shown. Henry Giroux links the spectacle to the creation of meaningless identities based on fear and vengeance that empty representations of terrorism provoke. Instead, literature develops extended relationships with characters that allows for identities to take shape over the course of a story. It also enables responses that confront fear as a means of foreclosure by questioning and interpreting. For Oliver, "When continued questioning and interpretation are the heart of representation, it is a form of translation through which meaning is given to 'bare life' as the gift that bestows humanity" (*Witnessing* 140). She sees a possibility to restore meaning to identity through art that responds to violent images by creating a counter narrative to the meaninglessness of the media spectacle: Critical engagement, thus,

restores the ability to respond and restores meaning to life, allowing for the formation of ethical subjects.³² Thus, to engage the spectacle is to enable responses and act ethically. For all of these critics, predictable representation, spectacle, is at the root of the problem. Narrative that interrogates, questions, and opens new possibilities in the face of terrorism enables responses to the spectacle of terrorism.

The Media Spectacle

Both the corporate media and terrorism slip a message into society at varying degrees of success. To demonstrate this point, I turn to the coincidence of an anecdote both Todd Gitlin and Jean Baudrillard employ. The two cultural critics use slightly different versions of the same story when discussing how the corporate media and terrorism respectively infiltrate society. The link between the two further exemplifies the relationship between the media and terrorism by demonstrating how each achieves a self-sustaining objective instead of conveying a message. For Gitlin in *Media Unlimited*, the anecdote involves a smuggler and a customs agent on the U.S./Mexican border. As the smuggler drives through the border station every so often, the agent searches the truck for contraband but never finds anything. After a long career and

³² Kelly Oliver defines subjectivity along these lines. Subjectivity, in her terms, is not the subjection to hegemonic narratives that Michel Foucault and others have argued. Oliver argues for an ethical subjectivity that is based on the ability to respond and engage others. It is based on a theory of ethics put forth by Levinas that argues responsibility for others, the other in this case being any other person, preexists the self. Oliver links Levinas's idea of responsibility to subjectivity arguing one must respond to others to become a subject.

impending retirement, the smuggler finally confesses that what is being smuggled is the truck itself (3-4). Baudrillard's version, from *The Spirit of Terrorism*, cites the anecdote as a "Nasreddin story" and shifts the scene to a desert frontier where the smuggler rides and consequently smuggles camels instead of trucks (56). Gitlin's anecdote serves as an explanatory parable. "The media have been smuggling the habit of living with the media" (4). In a similar vein, Baudrillard contends that terrorism, in particular suicide bombing, smuggles "the impossible exchange of death, the challenge to the system by the symbolic gift of death, which becomes the absolute weapon" (57). The secret of terrorism in Baudrillard's estimation is that instead of political change or a revolutionary moment it brings the death of both victims and perpetrators and simply conveys the message of death. Terrorism, thus, functions through fear brought on by the medium itself. Gitlin and Baudrillard use the same anecdote in their texts to say that both the corporate media and terrorism smuggle themselves into culture, effecting influence through the specific genres, linking the two in their spectacular natures. The media affects society through the construction of spectacles inherent to gaining an audience. Terrorism functions in the same manner. Baudrillard restates the point in his now famous adage: "The spectacle of terrorism forces the terrorism of spectacle upon us" (30).

Marshall McLuhan's famous statement in *Understanding Media*, "The medium is the message," posits the notion that it is not the ideas broadcast so much as the form of the medium that influences society (7). McLuhan's idea explains that the television's cultural industry produces a way of life and a mode of thought. The television provides

a “visual stress on continuity, uniformity, and connectedness” and “confronts us with the great technological means of implementing continuity and lineality by fragmented repetition” (364). The fragmentation cuts apart any holistic view and leaves a space for repetitive commentary to fill in a collective meaning. Thus, the broadcast visual media unifies thought around a single idea that produces conformist societal norms, creating a spectacle that grows in direct proportion to the attention given the corporate media.

Guy Debord understood the potential of the corporate media to create the spectacle he defines in *The Society of the Spectacle* simply through the way the medium functions. Since the 1967 publication of his influential text, it is still seen as an important tool in understanding contemporary culture, mainly because its principle ideas have intensified with the movement into the information age and a global economy based on perceptions, rather than realities.³³ The contemporary spectacle can be best observed as a creation of the corporate media as described by Guy Debord’s famous elucidation, but even he could not predict the incredible changes in the television medium since the 1967 publication of the text or even those transformations that have occurred just since 9/11 that have extended his vision and its consequences.³⁴ I allow for the growing role of

³³ The global economy moves on perceptions due to the way share prices are determined in a public trading environment. Their value, i.e. share price, is always determined by a perception of future earnings rather than the real value or sale price of a company at any present time. The idea specifically links to images in the way the footage of something is cut and produced to evoke a certain idea that draws a viewer in, creating a perception rather than understanding.

³⁴ Jennifer Webb and Tony Schirato explain the “shift in how the media operates, between the pre- and post-September 11 economies of news” (416). They explain how the post-September 11 environment of the news “left a serious meaning vacuum” that did not exist previously (416). Furthermore, changes like the crawl at the bottom of the screen and the fragmentation of the screen into different boxes have come about and/or

media representations in today's society while maintaining Debord's critique of capitalism as far as it applies to the corporate relationship mainstream media maintain toward profit-making and growth. Today's consideration of the spectacle needs to be modified to include the pervasiveness of the corporate media and the challenge it poses to understanding contemporary events. Debord argues that "If the spectacle – understood in the limited sense of those 'mass media' that are its most stultifying superficial manifestation – seems at times to be invading society in the shape of a mere *apparatus*, it should be remembered that this apparatus has nothing neutral about it" (19).³⁵ The corporate media pervades society with images that all have a purpose of drawing attention and bringing in a larger audience. Just like selling a manufactured good, images become a product in the capitalist sense of the term. The means through which the product is bought and sold is the medium itself, with more people tuning in to a particular broadcast. This process represents a cultural reorganization on a vast scale when television commands such a vast amount of attention and dictates the discussion going on in a culture.

Henry Giroux glosses Debord to explain how the corporate media "was a force for conformity, depoliticization, and passivity that relentlessly attempted to hijack any viable notion of critical engagement and resistance by reconstituting the educational

intensified since 9/11. Lynn Sharon Schwartz has great reactions to this in her book *The Writing on the Wall*, discussed later.

³⁵ I use the term corporate media where Debord uses mass media to highlight the significance of ratings to earn money in the 24-hour news business. Debord always understood the spectacle to be a manifestation of capitalist society in which entertainment and leisure were parts of the control capitalism held over society. Henry Giroux discusses this link between Debord, the corporate media, and capitalist culture in *Beyond the Spectacle of Terrorism* (38).

force of the culture” (37-38). The medium carries this out in its very structure, not in its intent to proffer a certain cultural value other than its own importance. The corporate media educates by continuously displaying tragic images and constantly explaining the same ideas that go along with them. The profit motive dictates what stories are shown and how they are portrayed. The best means of drawing attention to the medium wins, thus infiltrating society with more and more dramatic images that instill a desire to watch. It carries this out in its manifestation as a spectacle.

For Debord, the transformation of perceived reality into a media construct exemplifies how the spectacle consolidates belief into a single ideology. The process begins because people do not experience events first-hand. Everything is mediated by representations that masquerade as objective but are always already constructs created by directors, journalists, and experts. The decisions to show certain images, angles, or perspectives can be just as political as the event itself, whether or not the decisions were intended to be political. The news director may be working from an overt political standpoint but just be framing the story of an event to receive maximum exposure, thus privileging one perspective over another. When a particular story begins to receive play on one network, the others follow suit to capitalize and create a frenzy over something that may have previously been of little importance. It is cost-effective for the corporate media to reiterate an accessible storyline rather than investigate another area.

Furthermore, the audience already exists, so ratings are guaranteed. These stories then reverberate with a combination of images and expert testimonies associated with an ideology that becomes a point of solidarity, creating a hyperreality that unifies the

particular discourse and masks the plural nature of any situation.³⁶ For Debord, the process exemplifies the way “THE SPECTACLE is the acme of ideology, for in its full flower it exposes and manifests the essence of all ideological systems: the impoverishment, enslavement and negation of real life” (151). The spectacle slips in through the medium and brings with it an idea that becomes the norm. Individuals become subject to idea as the corporate media codifies the significance and it takes on a degree of naturalness that allows it to pass for reality. The images circulate and garner authority in their perceived reality, but as the image becomes the reference for reality, it loses its relationship to the real and is emptied of its productive content.

Images become devoid of content as their reference to the basic sense of reality is distorted in the repetition and conveyance through culture. Baudrillard calls this situation a simulacrum, where an image and a sense of reality are caught in a process of exchange. The process mirrors the capitalist method, making sense in the case of the corporate media, because it becomes repetition for itself, for the sake of promoting the medium and increasing ratings. Baudrillard explains the process of how an image becomes simulacra, completely contentless, in four steps:

- 1 It is the reflection of a basic reality.
- 2 It masks and perverts a basic reality.

³⁶ Baudrillard explains that when something becomes nothing more than an operation for itself it loses all sense of what is real in order to propagate its own idea. In this case, “it is no longer real at all. It is a hyperreal: the product of an irradiating synthesis of combinatory models in a hyperspace without atmosphere” (*Selected Writings* 170). The images that circulate lose touch with reality because they are more real than the actual event, shaping collective consciousness by relating more to the world of movies than to reality.

3 It masks the *absence* of a basic reality.

4 It bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum. (170)

Through these steps, it produces its own sense of reality. Images, thus, function in a loop where they refer back upon one another instead of any sense of reality. A video clip of an occurrence becomes the reality of the scene for someone that did not see it firsthand. It calls into question how a society witnesses anything in the media age, because such weight is placed on the authority of the image.

People become subject to the media spectacle by the unified ideology it produces that is always already a construct but gains traction through its perceived authority.³⁷ According to Debord, the process of subjection to the spectacle is uniquely suited to a capitalist environment where myths of choice and freedom actually consolidate the means of control. The common rebuttal to the media spectacle argument is that people choose what they watch, and in an era when television channels number in the hundreds and when diverse media compete for viewer's time, that argument seems logical. Storylines follow the logic of the open market that will capitalize on a certain product as it grows to maximum proportions, cashing in on it at its peak, and dumping it for something new only when it is exhausted. Producers from different networks pick up on

³⁷ Margaret Morse argues that to “appear on television is then to achieve a level of authority and validation as a subject that is not fully reciprocal” (10). There is a perception of authority just by being on the other side of the medium, the inside portion that is a nebulous ground to the viewer but creates a sense of omniscience, granting authority. The advanced technology news corporations have also lends authority, Morse argues.

the same stories to capitalize on already peaked interests and avoid the trouble of introducing a new storyline to the audience.

Debord's neologism, "Homo Spectator," describes the subjection of an individual to the capitalist spectacle and the ideology of freedom that enables subjection to the spectacle. People buy in freely but are unable to turn away. In the Sipadan hostage ordeal, the gripping human saga and the need to know what came next, a desire for closure, kept people returning to the television. Its appearance on multiple media outlets ensured its importance and brought a communal following to the story. The unity of the images across the spectrum, its cultivation of a communal following, and its repetition throughout culture help codify the images as reality, instituting the spectacle. Debord explains how "The spectacle appears at once as society itself, as a part of society and as a means of unification. As a part of society, it is that sector where all attention, all consciousness, converges" (12). With all eyes upon the Sipadan situation, it became a part of the cultural discourse. People naturally discuss the happenings they see on the news, putting them firmly into the cultural discourse and unifying opinions around the way in which the images are portrayed. Expert testimony and the tone of the broadcast both convey meanings that are picked up in by viewers and circulated throughout culture.³⁸ Debord echoes Baudrillard's notion of the simulacrum in its perceived reality effect. It unifies public attention in part because it lacks any content except for references back to previous images.

³⁸ The authority and ability of the media to construct opinions is discussed by both Michael Schudson, in *The Sociology of the News*, and Margaret Morse, in *Virtualities*. It will be discussed at length below.

The spectacle contains powerful voices to help garner authority and construct the prevailing discourse, attracting the maximum attention and drawing people in by association. Political rhetoric is the most common place where the corporate media picks up a voice to trumpet. The ruling order maintains a privileged voice by the status of the office, and in a democratic society, by the authority of the vote. Through these positions, power maintains its own prominence through the creation of self-serving spectacles. Debord explains how “By means of the spectacle the ruling order discourses endlessly upon itself in an uninterrupted monologue of self-praise. The spectacle is the self-portrait of power in the age of power’s totalitarian rule over the conditions of existence” (19). The political discourse that exhibits self-praise is picked up by the corporate media and effectively becomes knowledge in its repetition accompanied by images of power. Power, thus, has the ability to create knowledge in an environment where the privileged voice is looked upon as the authority. The political rhetoric lends the semblance of truth that then becomes the agreed upon fact when the corporate media picks up the idea.³⁹

All of the rhetoric of politicians and the dramatic footage reporters can find plays into the genre of infotainment that the corporate media employs to garner ratings. Political scientist Brigitte Nacos develops the idea of infotainment when looking at the way television news programs present the story of terrorism, but the concept pertains to any dramatic story the corporate media latches on to. She describes how infotainment “thrives on the very images and themes that terrorists incidents offer – drama, tragedy, shock, anger, grief, fear, panic – the ideal ingredients for transforming real-life terror

³⁹ See Michael Schudson’s discussion of truth and the media in *Why Democracies Need an Unlovable Press*.

into breathtaking thrillers or heartbreaking soap operas designed to captivate and stir up audiences” (37). Infotainment describes the way corporate media makes a tabloid program out of current happenings by interjecting commentary and the most dramatic footage. It extends the idea of the spectacle in the way it utilizes confusion as well as other affective responses to draw and keep an audience. The editorial control of the commentary and footage ensure that it will be the most controversial and spectacular in order to draw viewers in by entertaining them. Infotainment makes a reality TV program out of a horrific event, like the one at the outset of this chapter.⁴⁰ The genre of infotainment has its own rules of representation and narration that differ but lead into the literary through their similarities. Infotainment contains elements of a literary genre exemplified by the telling of individual stories, but only the parts that inspire fascination or awe and make them seem more like a movie than reality. Infotainment makes villains and heroes, similar to the literary, out of the global players in order to construct familiar narratives with which a broad part of society is familiar and can be drawn in. Nacos warns against the dangers of elevating a terrorist to the status of world leader even when vilified by the corporate media.⁴¹ Infotainment also leads the media to endless debate

⁴⁰ Jennifer Webb and Tony Schirato call this the “hysterical order of the soap opera,” when the media becomes an entertainment spectacle (411). They relate the entertainment oriented soap operas to the corporate media in the way they both use confusion and detachment to draw the audience in.

⁴¹ Nacos uses the example of the first Bin Laden video that appeared after the September 11. She goes on to argue that Bin Laden has since then been given the status of a world leader through his attention in the media as head of his terrorist network (64).

over the possible tragedies to come, creating a culture of fear when media attention is given to the expert with the most horrifying threat.⁴²

The voices of the corporate media rely on a definitive structure that shapes public expectations and cultivates a perceived authority. The simple fact that the television personality seems to be closer to the situation than the viewer and at times has access to participants gives influence to the corporate media. The anchorperson or journalist may be present on the scene or may simply be better plugged in through technology the viewer does not have access to. It creates different subject positions through the definitive structure of the roles of speaker, imparting wisdom, and viewer, recipient of knowledge. Margaret Morse describes how this separation is part of “American-style news productions, with their sharp role divisions and hierarchical structure” (37). The model of the evening anchorperson maintains this distinction, a single trusted guide, all knowing and trustworthy, to take the viewer through the troubled world. The news personality becomes the trusted voice, forming a type of narrative hegemony that produces knowledge or ideologies based on the information offered.⁴³ It creates a disparity in who becomes a speaking subject. The newscaster or journalist has voice while the viewer does not and cannot speak in light of the authority of the corporate

⁴² Nacos calls this “the media’s sudden obsession with endlessly reporting and debating the potential for biological, chemical, and nuclear warfare in the wake of 9-11” (65).

⁴³ Sociologist Michael Schudson argues that even the best journalists lose their neutrality in at least three different cases. “First, in moments of tragedy, journalists assume an almost priestly role.” “Second, in moments of public danger, journalists replace professional objectivity with neighborly reassurance.” “Finally, journalists reflect neutrality during threats to national security” (188).

media.⁴⁴ The news becomes spectacle when forecloses the story by inhibiting response rather than empowering it, authorizing the images to construct the essence of a scene.⁴⁵ The authority cuts off direct engagement allowing the images to take over for reality and institute their own ideological control as the image becomes the reference point.

The corporate media uses technology to create what media theorist Margaret Morse calls figures of induction that draw the attention of viewers and convey a sense of presence to the actions on the screen. The “figures of induction” which Morse defines as “literal representations of an act of the imagination that permit the reader or viewer or visitor to a virtual environment to enter and explore worlds that are otherwise inaccessible by virtue of their two-dimensionality, scale, solidity, immateriality, or imaginariness” (89). Intense graphics add to the spectacle by moving, flashing, and reaching out to the viewer bringing them figuratively inside of the action on the screen.⁴⁶ The effects connect the viewer to the screen and involve them like never before. The viewer enters a world where the suspension of reality is the norm and is carried away by the voices and new perspectives of the virtual realm. Viewers do not move but the world around them does, bringing them into a place where they cannot speak and have no

⁴⁴ Morse explains how the “news format is a very restrictive rather than inclusive discursive type with a monologic structure that both legitimates and severely limits the subjects produced by the news” (38).

⁴⁵ Debord describes how the spectacle “is the opposite of dialogue,” establishing its rule by closing off voices and instituting the unity of the spectacle (17).

⁴⁶ It is through the use of the “z-axis,” as Morse calls it, that graphics can envelope the viewer (72). The axis extends out of the screen and when used, constructs the feeling of being inside of the action. For example, when graphics seemingly circle around on the screen but leave the screen at the sides to virtually encapsulate the viewer in its arc. Also, when the focus point drastically moves in upon something, starting with a broad view and narrowing down, it brings the viewer from outside to inside just by the camera technique.

agency but to view. The induction facilitates a loss of control in a world where even time and place have no significance. The television spectacle takes over the lived reality and replaces it with its opposite, an unreality that takes over lived experience.⁴⁷ This becomes the embodiment of the spectacle. The place where, for Debord, the spectacle “is that sector where all attention, all consciousness, converges” (12). Through the use of computerized graphics, public consciousness converges within the television screen and emerges unified under the banner of the corporate media’s portrayals. It shows how the spectacle becomes “a social relationship between people that is mediated by images” (12).

The relationship, however, does not involve dialogue and effectively takes away the ability to respond in favor of a communal narrative shaped by the spectacle. The foreclosure invokes one of the basic premises Debord argues, “The spectacle subjects living human beings to its will” (16). The spectacle cuts off critical engagement in favor of passive adherence to the corporate media images and commentary.⁴⁸ Furthermore, terrorism proves to be the extreme version of the spectacle and the means of foreclosure of the subject. Infotainment capitalizes on the dramatic images that terrorism offers and the villainous cast of characters to create a spectacle. Terrorism proves to be a spectacle in itself.

⁴⁷ Debord argues that the spectacle inverts life. “The spectacle in its generality is a concrete inversion of life, and, as such, the autonomous movement of non-life” (12). I link this thought to the way graphics bring the viewer into an environment of non-life, where viewers give over their sense of control to be part of the images on the screen.

⁴⁸ Henry Giroux explains how the spectacle at its inception was conceived as a “force for conformity, depoliticization, and passivity that relentlessly attempted to hijack any viable notion of critical engagement and resistance by reconstituting the educational force of the culture” (37-38).

Witnessing Terrorism

An often forgotten maxim is that “terrorism exists to terrorize” through its conveyance of fear in a targeted population. The message is spread through the corporate media and information systems that have the ability to affect a large number of people quickly, magnifying the effect of a terrorist event. Manuel Castells describes terrorism as “*l’action exemplaire*: a spectacular action is undertaken which, by its powerful appeal, even through sacrifice, calls people’s attention to the movement’s claims, and is ultimately intended to wake up the masses, manipulated by propaganda and subdued by repression” (163). While this description may be too close to justifying terrorism, it fits the idea that terrorism is a derivative of the society dominated by the spectacle. In order to influence culture, Castells recognizes the need for a definitive action to cut through the overwhelming amount of information that circulates in the contemporary world. Consequently, Alex Schmid and Jenny de Graaf call terrorism “propaganda of the deed” in their study of the way violence, in particular terrorism communicates a message (11). The act of terrorism has a purpose in mind, even if the point is far outside the political mainstream. Bruce Hoffman further acknowledges that it is a mistake to see terrorism as without an objective. He explains how “all terrorist groups have one trait in common: none commits actions randomly or senselessly. Each wants maximum publicity to be generated by its actions and, moreover, aims at intimidation and subjection to attain its objectives” (131). Hoffman realizes how terrorists know they must utilize the lens of the media to carry forth their goals and plan

attacks with that in mind. Hoffman also notes the subjective element to the terrorist goal that links it to the spectacle. Terrorism wants to subject the public to a specific political agenda normally carried out through fear and intimidation.⁴⁹ The arguable political goals ascribed to terrorism can only be conveyed through the publicity the exemplary action garners, so whatever perspective one maintains, the event still needs the media to succeed. Terrorism has always been around in its spectacular form, but the current proliferation of information technology in our networked society makes the spectacle that much more effective.⁵⁰ Couple this with the foreclosure of alternative voices, and we have the makings of a system able to perpetuate itself indefinitely.

Horrific events attract attention, but terrorism requires attention to overcome the perception of being mere violence. “The terror act can arguably exist without victims; it cannot, however, exist without spectators,” explains Stephen J. Mexal (318). Both ideas portray the link between terrorism and the media as a more dangerous relationship than many believe. The fact that terror exists to terrorize is evidenced by the name itself, and the larger the audience the larger the act. Horrific videos of beheadings, sniper shootings, and suicide bombings attract the attention of the media in an obvious manner: the more spectacular the footage, the greater the impact. However, sometimes the media withholds images due to their ethical implications. It demonstrates sensitivity to overtly offensive images but plays into the profit motive all the same. Offending the audience is

⁴⁹ Brigitte Nacos interviewed several journalists that admitted they feared the way the corporate media had become “merchants of fear” (66). They cited the constant speculations on what possible acts could come next and the continued escalation of those acts. Each subsequent story was more horrific than the last.

⁵⁰ Walter Laqueur makes his point in a history of terrorism.

a sure bet to turn people off. In the race for ratings, the corporate media broadcasts and/or reports on the videos provide the sensational impact desired by the terrorists and supply the impetus for more spectacular attacks. The media supplies the means through which terrorism becomes a spectacle, and terrorism exists as a spectacle. For Mexal, “the acme of the terror act is its spectacularization, enabling its transition from localized tragedy to a collectivized spectacle of victimization” (319). The spectacle invokes solidarity with the victims of the event, interpolating spectators as victims also, leading toward an entire culture being influenced by its solidarity to the spectacle of terrorism that has enabled a unified response to the horror of terrorism but also produced an ideology of condemnation and fear. This foreclosure by the spectacle makes questioning the issue difficult, but also demonstrates the grave need to question in order to avoid being a culture dictated to by terror and absolute fear.

The point is to observe the indelible link between terrorism and the corporate media; one uses the other for its own purposes. Infotainment plays into the terrorist strategy by providing a means through which to identify or even brand their organization. The preference for drama requires that infotainment build characters that people can know and see, both heroes and villains alike. Thus, terrorists are given voice by exploring who they are, their backgrounds, and their political beliefs and objectives. Furthermore, speculation about their identities and causes leads to even more groups gaining the spotlight in the aftermath of terror incidents.⁵¹ Nacos explains how in past

⁵¹ Brigitte Nacos explains the negative impact of speculation by the corporate media in the aftermath of a terrorist attack as being part of the terrorist’s goal (12). The government plays a role too by giving the corporate media official speculation about

incidents “Terrorists and terrorism had set the media agenda, the public agenda, and the government agenda. To the terrorists, the attention of the mass media, the public, and government decision makers was a total victory” (52). If the media portrays the act of terror in all of its intensity and for everyone to see, then terrorists have shifted the content of the news and changed the discussion to focus upon their acts and motives. It amounts to a victory when the terrorist causes become the first topic on the news.

Terrorism as such is a dramatic discourse that feeds the goals of infotainment. It does so by being a spectacle itself, easily fitting into the spectacular nature of the infotainment genre. In every way, the coverage of terrorism furthers the goals of the terrorist and subsequently furthers the manifestation of the spectacle of terrorism.⁵² Furthermore, terrorism is itself a means of communication, and when programs overdramatize the fear; they contribute to the communicative aspect of what amounts to a violent act.⁵³

The spectacle provides terrorism with the means to extend the event and travel across borders and through populations to challenge people on a global scale; the spectacle gives terrorism its legs. Henry Giroux argues that “The spectacle of terrorism has colonized the gaze and imagination of millions of people, especially as it emerges in a flood of images that bypass traditional sites of power” (49). It dominates how people view the world by instilling fear that has its own power. Fear causes rash decisions and

who carried out a specific attack that is then picked up by broadcasts to bring about more attention on the suspected terrorists.

⁵² Joseba Zulaika and William Douglass make the point, “The ironic dimension of terrorism discourse derives from its furthering the very thing it abominates” (22). I link this point to the investigations of terrorism and terrorist incidents that the corporate media carries out.

⁵³ Nacos explains how “Terrorism is at its core communication” (150).

brings about selfish motives that exist outside of normal considerations, causing power to be shifted into the realm of emotional reactions instead of deliberative decisions. Furthermore, a live broadcast can unify the moment by making all viewers feel like witnesses, connecting them to the tragedy while supplying the discourse to define it, effectively closing off the dialogue, deliberations, or questions that help people better understand complex happenings. The illusion of objectivity and authority give the media the influence to privilege one narrative over another most likely decided upon by hired experts or experienced professionals interviewed on scene but still traumatized by the event. The viewer identifies with the chaotic images of human drama that seem to make no sense in themselves and the voices brought into living rooms that define the chaos. Sociologist Samuel Weber explains that “The internal contradiction of such identification is that it institutes an image of unity while occupying two places at once: the desired place of wholeness *and* the feared place of disunity” (455). Weber relies upon the notion that human beings desire community and associations that make people feel part of a whole.⁵⁴ The fear of disunity compels the viewer to buy into the expert account of the professional or the traumatized narrative of the on-scene witness.⁵⁵ Thus,

⁵⁴ Political theorist Amy Gutman makes a similar argument in *Identity and Democracy*. She explains how people are drawn to communal identities and derive a sense of purpose and empowerment from such associations.

⁵⁵ Benjamin Barber argues that this is “Fear’s Empire,” when political agendas at home push the very panic that the terrorist engenders creating a type of fear on fear relationship. The terrorist act cultivates anxiety that governments use to push an agenda that moves the bounds of existing laws and conceptions of human rights, a “state of exception” mentality. “Fear is terrorism’s tool and catalyst, the multiplier and amplifier of actual terrorist events that on the global scale are few and far between and, while devastating to those directly affected, are of less statistical consequence than say a year’s traffic fatalities or the mundane tragedies of people falling off ladders at home” (31).

fear unifies the discourse effectively creating a spectacle out of the perceived presence. The objectivity of the spectacle is reaffirmed in each media repetition that reconnects the viewer with the memory of the media event, and the inherent contradiction of a presence brought about through distance is lost. The oxymoron defines the media spectacle, but the way the spectacle links the media and terrorism to the world goes even further when contemporary technologies come into play.

Information technology has made instantaneous reception of the spectacle possible. The corporate media has a global reach in many cases while other communication technologies enable more and more people to link with the information provided by the most prominent sources. The vast quantity of sources offers differing perspectives, but it simply creates a situation where the loudest voice, the most dramatic spectacle, still breaks through to control the dominant discourse. The information technologies enable a globalization of the spectacle in a diverse range of ways, so many that it can be described as information overload. Paul Virilio calls this an “information bomb,” a peculiar name when thinking through the link between terrorism and the spectacle. The overwhelming amount of information that comes from any single terrorist incident overloads the senses and furthers confusion about an incident.⁵⁶ It adds to the

Barber terms this strategy “Pax Americana,” peace forced through the use/threat of American intervention, adding concerns produced by governments to the anxieties produced by terrorists. The culture of fear obscures the reality of terrorism on both sides of the issue to the point where it dominates the lives of people living with obscure chances of being involved.

⁵⁶ Miriam Hansen explains how technological advancement adds to the foreclosure by the spectacle. “The unprecedented acceleration of technological innovation and circulation have created conditions in which consciousness is more than ever inadequate to the state of technological development, its power to destroy and enslave human

foreclosure of subjects through a collective loss of voice that takes place on a global scale. Virilio explains how it amounts to a “planetary grand-scale optics” brought about through the ability to transmit live broadcasts around the world in an instant. It amounts to a mode of seeing, an optic, because it reorganizes the way people view images around the globe. It puts the images front and center for the entire world to see and regulates the gaze by presenting too much information, so much that other voices are needed to cut through the static and confusion of the information bomb. For Virilio, “The sudden multiplication of ‘points of view’ merely heralds the latest globalization: the globalization of the gaze, of a single eye of the Cyclops who governs the cave” (18). The single eye is the only eye through which people then see a particular incident after the spectacle has overexposed the images to the world and cultivated confusion rather than understanding. A communal understanding comes forth that fills in a common definition and unifies thought, resisting individual attempts to rationalize an event. Any situation needs multiple perspectives to retain a relevant point of view. Depth is formed through diverse interpretations and careful consideration, which the corporate media does not provide.

The spectacle infiltrates every aspect of society down to the most personal of spaces and denudes the subject matter. Even the domestic sphere becomes the territory of the spectacle.⁵⁷ Virilio argues that televised images have reshaped the homefront

bodies, hearts, and minds” (394). Technology, therefore, forecloses upon the subject through its transmission of the spectacle. It takes voice by taking over the hearts and minds of people.

⁵⁷ Virilio goes on to argue how this reshapes local culture and has a globalizing effect not only on the gaze but also on distinct societies, creating a “new type of localness”

through “a television which no longer has the task of informing or entertaining the mass of viewers, but of exposing and invading individuals’ domestic space, like a new form of lightning, which is capable of revolutionizing the notion of *neighborhood unit*, or of a building or district” (59). It does so through the evolution of the spectacle, information technologies that permeate contemporary life, and the strategies the corporate media use to draw viewers at all times of the day. People cannot retreat from the communal rhetoric that both circles the globe at an instant and is everpresent in one’s own space. It permeates life to the degree that it has the ability to instill submission through the confusion caused by information overload. Images strip situations of substance by exposing them completely. When something traumatic occurs, the images that circulate defy explanation or call for the most horrific of terms to describe them. However, commentators must be cautious with their language in order not to offend various parts of the population, so the descriptions do not necessarily fit the horror of the video. Virilio calls this “*optical shock*” when images assault people in an unconscious and unauthorized way and are accompanied by rhetoric that does not necessarily fit the extremity of the situation. The confusion instills itself in individuals to the point that further commentary is able to reshape consciousness by filling the void of uncertainty.⁵⁸

(59). It further demonstrates how images permeate culture and challenge individuals through a collectivizing effect. The local loses in most cases, just like the individual loses a voice in the face of the spectacle.

⁵⁸ Virilio explains how images strip everything of substance and expose the subject matter to an unprecedented extent. It has come about due to live coverage of events where something unexpected happens and explicit images are shown yet commentators are forced to use language that is more banal in order not to further offend the audience. He explains that “With live coverage (either in real time or with a slight delay), this internal contradiction has become very difficult ... the instant commentary for reporters

It represents yet another way in which alternative articulations are silenced by the corporate media. Thus, the total visibility of anything that goes on around the world has the ability to leave individuals in a traumatized state, powerless and confused.⁵⁹

The media spectacle of terrorism carries the trauma of the initial incident to the global audience, instituting a problem of witnessing the actual event. The corporate media has the ability to repetitively inflict the wound on the mind of the audience, which institutes a crisis in knowing how the actual event occurred and how to react to it.⁶⁰ The crisis is intensified by the interpretive lens of the corporate media who do not attempt a faithful rendering of the initial event but depict the most horrific scenes repetitively until they stand in as the signifiers for the actual event. The transmission of trauma through the corporate media causes what E. Ann Kaplan calls a vicarious or secondary trauma. “All media response should be seen as at most vicarious trauma, not as experiencing trauma itself,” according to Kaplan (90). In an age when most people experience trauma through the media, understanding how images and discourses institute their own trauma becomes of vital importance. “Spectators do not feel the protagonist’s trauma. They feel the pain evoked by empathy – arousing mechanisms interacting with their own traumatic

who find themselves at the frontiers of the word and the image, permanently caught between a ‘soft’ (politically correct) language and the ‘hard’ (visually incorrect) images of ‘see-it-now’ –style broadcasting” (70). It has an effect on all communication to the point where it becomes an “*optical shock*” on a global scale.

⁵⁹ In a discussion of trauma theory, Ruth Leys describes the penchance of “turn-of-the-century figures to describe the wounding of the *mind* brought by sudden, unexpected, emotional shock” that causes the inability to recall the traumatic occurrence and resultant loss of voice (4).

⁶⁰ Cathy Caruth describes how trauma, as envisioned in texts that explore the theme, contains “a central problem of listening, of knowing, and of representing that emerges from the actual experience of the crisis” (5).

experiences” (90). The fragmented images carried around the world at great speed defy initial understandings and allow spectators to fill the gaps with personal experiences. What derives from this process, Kaplan calls “‘empty’ empathy,” which is “empathy elicited by images of suffering provided without any context or background knowledge” (93). It allows people to think they understand the feelings of the actual victims of a tragedy because they have gone through something traumatic themselves. However, the emptiness implies that there is a misrecognition of the feeling and experience that turns into problem of witnessing. The inability to deal with the incident adds to the confusion caused by the fragmented images and people rely upon personal experience find understanding. The association with fragmented images fills in meaning which fails to deal adequately with the traumatic event. Furthermore, Kaplan cautions that contemporary society is a “culture of sentimentality and addiction to ‘wounded attachments,’” which fill the emptiness with negative associations that further the inability to respond or witness the event (22).⁶¹ It inhibits the subject offering a response that works through the tragic circumstance and allows subjects to come forward with a voice.⁶²

The media spectacle produces a crisis in witnessing that inhibits questioning in favor of initial reactions formed in the confusing environment of fragmented images and

⁶¹ Kaplan refers to Wendy Brown and Lauren Berlant here. Their respective texts, *States of Injury* and *The Queen of Washington Goes to Washington City*, both offer examples of how contemporary culture privileges injury.

⁶² I refer here to Dominick LaCapra’s concepts of working through or acting out trauma. In *History in Transit*, he explains “Working-through is itself an articulatory practice that counteracts the compulsive effects of post-traumatic symptoms without trying to achieve full mastery or total consciousness of past traumas” (15). It articulates a type of response that does not pretend to define the event.

endless commentary. In *Women as Weapons of War*, Kelly Oliver explains how “A spectacle can produce a visceral reaction, a bodily response, but resists interpretation – any such introspection on the part of the viewer is deemed superfluous” (86). Without interpretation, the viewer remains powerless in light of the media spectacle, and images float freely without context that can provide the language to discuss the event. The context needed to respond to the event is created through “narratives that explain or study them in relation to other images, actions, desires, or values” (*Women as* 90). Oliver calls for the construction of narratives that connect previous personal tragedies to the trauma at hand, putting them in an active dialogue that compares and contrasts the emotive responses. However, the spectacle resists such an engagement leaving people to live in a society dominated by its effect.⁶³ It reduces individual freedom and inhibits any questioning that might lead to an authentic response.

Without the ability to respond, people are left without the voice needed to enter into an empowered subjectivity. It is a distinct problem of the corporate media that cuts off singular interpretation in favor of its own unified version. Oliver argues, “The freedom of the market allows for interpretation only so long as it sells” (*Witnessing* 10). Her point refers to the profit motive and how stories only become news if they draw an audience. It puts the corporate media in competition with the other discourses that circulate in society. Individual means of responding to a trauma are cut down by the corporate version that resonates collectively and garners authority through its repetitive

⁶³ Oliver explains how the “world of representation has become disconnected from our affective or psychic lives; the result is an inability to represent (and thereby live) our emotional lives outside of the economy of spectacle” (*Witnessing* 141).

portrayal. Furthermore, infotainment has the effect of depoliticizing events and disempowering authentic response in the process through its endless creation of heroes and villains that personalize tragedy instead of deal with the effects.⁶⁴ The genre posits the need to find a new way of viewing and interpreting the media spectacle of terrorism that allows for subjectivity to come forth by enabling ethical responses. The problem the spectacle posits is, how do we see an event for what it truly is? Oliver adds a further element by asking, how do we enable responses?

Part of the process of witnessing is realizing that one needs to go beyond any simple idea of identification and realize the essential gaps in all modes of seeing, especially traumatic viewing.⁶⁵ One cannot ever fully view another or an event and part of ethical recognition is realizing a common humanity that leaves room for difference or the singularity of another person or event. Any definition or explanation that attempts to elude questions and fully define something does not allow for response and therefore proves to be unethical. The spectacle is one such example in the way it closes down discussion and avoids interpretations and questions that are vital to finding meaning.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Oliver explains how interviews with soldiers and survivors serve to personalize tragedy in a way that cuts off political action by eliciting empty empathy. “Viewers and readers are left with sentiment and empty empathy that do not translate into political reflection, let alone action” (*Women as* 79). It tells a viewer how to respond instead of allowing responses to come forth that lead to new understandings and political discourse.

⁶⁵ In *Remnants of Auschwitz*, Giorgio Agamben describes the essential lacunae in all traumatic modes of viewing that must be realized in order to respond adequately to a situation.

⁶⁶ Oliver, in *Women as Weapons of War*, argues that “continued questioning and interpretation are the heart of representation, it is a form of translation through which meaning is given to ‘bare life’ as the gift that bestows humanity” (140). I apply this to the media spectacle to show how the spectacle proves to do just the opposite, closing down life and subjectivity in the process.

Furthermore, questions imply that the event or the other are not fully known and are being allowed to come forward in unique ways. Questioning pays attention to the essential absence contained within all modes of representation, the gap between presentation and representation that cannot be bridged. The spectacle attempts to close down this gap, but forecloses the subject in the process, eliminating voice. Other means of viewing events must be employed in order to confront the spectacle.

The move toward recognition allows for new modes of seeing that affect the politics of representation. As mentioned above, going beyond recognition allows for a realization of the essential gaps in all representations and interpretations, allowing absences to remain in order for identities and responses to come forward in ways that go beyond what is able to be seen on the surface level. In *Witnessing*, Oliver argues that the move “from recognition to witnessing provides alternative notions of ethical, social, and political responsibility entailed by this conception of subjectivity” (15). Allowing room for others to respond and recognizing the productive potential in responding to others becomes a politics founded on processes of witnessing that enable a bottom up sensibility when it comes to defining events or identifying others; these need to come from within, not without. Oliver’s key point is that meaning forms from responding to something outside of one’s self and allowing the means for that other to take its own shape. In the case of another person, this process means allowing the individual to respond in return, or become “response-able.” In the case of an event, the process allows meaning to form through questioning and interpretation that allows meanings to take shape based on responses instead of pre-conceived ideas. “It is fed by the process of

interpretation, which nourishes meaning” (*Women as* 11). It is antithetical to a media spectacle that strives to define according to what will sell best and be seen the most.⁶⁷ Ordinarily, meanings take shape based on market principles instead of recognizing the value of understanding. The corporate media, as mentioned already, exists on this principle. To confront the foreclosure of terrorism by these and other forces, Oliver calls for people “to be vigilant in interpretation, elaboration, and analysis” to see beyond what is presented in the spectacle and observe the necessary gaps in any mode of representation (*Witnessing* 218). A new mode of envisioning terrorism needs to be developed that utilizes the questions and analysis Oliver sights that will open gaps in the totality the media spectacle portrays.

The Terrorist and Literary Event

Throughout this chapter, I have argued that the media, politics, and global consumerism act as mechanisms of foreclosure, assigning names to processes that close off multiple understandings and unify the meaning of diverse processes. Only as people begin to see the world through what Maurizio Lazzarato calls the “paradigm of the event,” where “images, signs and statements contribute to allowing the world to happen” instead of constructing the world in which we live, can we begin to challenge foreclosure (1). The paradigm requires a particular mode of interpreting singular occurrences, events

⁶⁷ Oliver explains how in the face of the spectacle “the market allows for interpretation only so long as it sells; and within our wealthy democracy the meaning of life is reduced to material wealth rather than wealth of the psyche or soul” (*Women as* 10).

that interrupt normative understanding. The process of fidelity to an event allows for a self-evident perspective formed through making connections between diverse elements of the event allowing new meaning to take shape based on the competing discourses in society.⁶⁸ Below, I explain these terms and how this paradigm relates to terrorism and the way a new perspective enlightened by the event can challenge the mechanisms of foreclosure. Furthermore, the process of fidelity to an event allows people to ethically respond and witness an event for what it is. I also argue that contemporary literature acts as a process of fidelity that builds upon the absent center of discourse and the unrepresentable aspect of representation that are the legacy of deconstruction and postmodernism respectively.

In order to confront the totality of the media spectacle of terrorism, I propose viewing terrorism through the lens of the event, as what I call a *terrorist event*. This idea relies upon Badiou's, among others, conception of an event. Such a conception sheds light on the multiplicities contained within any singular occurrence, uses the process of fidelity to an event, and understands how the state of a situation works against the event. All of these terms, explained below, lead to a mode of thought that lifts the foreclosure of terrorism and allows a subject to engage, letting meaning come forth over time and with careful consideration. The process acknowledges the challenge to understanding posed by any terrorist event and forms understanding based on the connections between different elements while maintaining the gaps and aporias inherent to an event instead of

⁶⁸ Lazzarato's statement above sheds light on how multiple forces, even those that previously defined something, become one part of the new mode of understanding. For example, images that contributed to the media spectacle still come to bear on the event, but only as a single part that connects with other elements to shape our understanding.

unifying it as a single totality. It allows for singular understandings and a multiplicity of meanings, which keeps the terrorist event fluid and open for engagement. These elements are key to gaining knowledge of the event and countering the future occurrences of something as devastating as terrorism.

Alain Badiou's body of work focuses on a new way of seeing an occurrence, what he calls an event.⁶⁹ Badiou's thought contains within it a mode of interpretation and analysis that allows an individual to respond and see an event for what it is, denuded of the layers of obfuscation built by the spectacle.⁷⁰ An event for Badiou is an occurrence that interrupts a manifest understanding; it ushers in a new thought that does not define, does not name, and allows meaning to come forth through the process of making divergent connections over time. Badiou formulates a conception of the event and its effect in order to observe the process through which knowledge or the truth of a certain situation comes into being for an individual. The project attempts to realize the potential of a singular occurrence to change an existing understanding. The complex method begins with a particular notion of an event, allows for transformation to occur through the experience, and argues that a subjective truth is apparent only to the individual that comes through the process.

⁶⁹ Jason Barker explains that the "question of true *perception*, of the subject being able to discern the event's truth for itself in the absence of any state involvement, is the higher ambition of Badiou's philosophical enterprise" (83). Thus, Barker positions the event in direct opposition to the spectacle as a mode of seeing something for what it is. The "state involvement" itself is the spectacle defining the terms in a designated way.

⁷⁰ Peter Hallward explains that for Badiou, the "subject is the agent or instance of this process as a whole," and "Badiou's subjects are always solitary, singular, always endangered" (124). The subject results from the event and exists with a unique understanding of the event that is endangered, in the case of terrorism, by the media spectacle.

The relevant factor regarding truth to which I want to draw attention is that truth results from the process; it is not essentialist, structuralist, or preconceived; it is radically contingent upon the event. For Badiou, truth is plural and does not exist in a single finite form. Truth is also a process that comes out of an event that reveals an absence, or what he calls the “void of the situation” (*Handbook* 55). Truth amounts to a realization that every singularity contains indiscernible parts and elements that change over time. Truth must be contingent upon the conditions and variables of an event.⁷¹ In *Infinite Thought*, Badiou places the conception of truth “both as a construction of a fidelity to an event, and as the generic potency of a transformation of a domain of knowledge” (58). Truth derives from the event when we have fidelity to it, and in Badiou’s terminology, this means we view the event as a disruption of the repetition of normality that he describes as knowledge.⁷² Truth derived from an event is of necessity new. Something dramatic must occur for the event’s process to take place and challenge existing ideas: “I call it an event. A truth thus appears, in its newness, because an evental supplement interrupts repetition” (62). Occurrences that represent a repetition of the same and do not attempt to change accepted knowledge are not events in Badiou’s sense. Only by experiencing the event can a person come to a new understanding of a particular truth and achieve a meaning uncorrupted by ideology. This means that truth exists on its own for each

⁷¹ Barbara Hernstein Smith defines “*contingent*: equally the product, in other words, of conditions (experimental, contextual, institutional, and so forth) that are fundamentally variable and always to some extent unpredictable and uncontrollable” (xvii). It resonates with Badiou’s understanding of truth and the contingencies it is founded upon.

⁷² Badiou argues that “the *minimal* gesture of fidelity” is “the observation of a connection (or non-connection)” (*Being and* 329). Truth, thus, derives from connecting parts and constructing meaning through the connections, not connecting to a single name that defines it.

person in what Badiou calls a “multiplicity” of truth. On the surface, this appears to be a particularistic account of truth, but through the process of the event knowledge is always based on an occurrence that avoids truth being constructed for an individual by other forces that would name it according to a certain ideology or hegemonic mode of thought. The event is produced anew through a process akin to Kelly Oliver’s witnessing, where responding to the occurrence creates meaning through interpretation and careful consideration.

An event implies; it does not define. Peter Hallward calls the event “the occasion of an implication. An event is simply an opportunity for some members of a situation, if they so decide, to affirm that which they can never experience or observe, namely the inconsistency that they and all other members of the situation indifferently and indiscernibly are” (18). The indeterminacy forces a confrontation with foreclosure, when the event is understood as an “inconsistency” it cannot be contained in the tight confines of a single definition. It breaks out of the categorical walls or ideological foundations that are normally relied upon to name something and forces a consideration of what it is, in all of its newness. However, in order for an event to have a destabilizing effect, it needs to be inconsistent when it comes to various individuals, and it needs to throw the identity of something into flux in order for newness to appear. It must act as a type of intervention that sheds new light on a situation.⁷³ The multiplicity in this encounter

⁷³ Hallward defines how the term “‘intervention’ describes both the courage to name the event (or to affirm its implication) and the determination to make this implication apply” (125). To simply say an event occurred is to say that something happened that shifted thought, that the event occurred. In many instances, and especially in the case of a terrorist event, this can be politically dangerous to proclaim.

becomes a true multiplicity, exerting difference and embracing the truth effect of indetermination. When identity is predetermined, ideology predetermines too much or the understanding of an occurrence and belief succumbs to the unquestioned reality of past doctrines. Events allow for an understanding of the mystifying effects of opportunities and occurrences. If fidelity to the event is not maintained, we lose the “interruption” of the contemporary processes that an event provides. This process does not attempt to represent an experience, because we do not know anything about the “interruption.” However, it does invoke an opportunity at which time confusion prevails and the balancing effect that is fidelity offers a way for multiplicities to come forward and become the central referent for identity.

Events occur at these points of indetermination between two incommensurable sides of the paradox. The event opens the gap between opposite sides and challenges ideological and structural oppositions. This change begins with the smallest level, the individual understanding, and works through the entire system. It occurs and challenges the current understandings of a subject matter and pushes thought into new grounds. This is the manner in which truth, for Badiou, comes to light, a truth that precedes being.⁷⁴ The new insight provides a sort of transformation, for it is not seen in the same light again. It is knowledge founded upon the inherent qualities of any event: multiplicity, singularity, and individual understanding.

⁷⁴ Badiou explains, “A truth is solely constituted by rupturing with the order which supports it, never as an effect of that order. I have named this type of rupture which opens up truths ‘the event’” (*Being and* xii).

Badiou's "fidelity" is a process through which knowledge is formed with an understanding that there are multiple pieces to any situation that need to be examined, connected, and recognized before a name can be given to the situation. Fidelity does not construct the meaning of an event but provides a method for an individual to come to a subjective significance. Any conclusion needs to be based on the connections between the divergent parts. For Badiou, fidelity "discerns the connection of presented multiples to a particular multiple, the event" (*Being and* 236). It is a process carried out by a person who understands the multiplicities and connections that determine the meaning of any given situation and stays clear of any hastily formed conclusions that put a particular unifying name on a process, predetermining its meaning before understanding its multiple significances. Any event is essentially a multiplicity made up of parts that are themselves multiplicities, *ad infinitum*. Fidelity connects pieces that become apparent to an individual while recognizing that there always remain more elements to a situation. Therefore, knowledge of an event remains fluid and open, any truth derived from its occurrence represents the contingencies present at the time.

Badiou approaches terrorism directly as an event due to how terror ushers in a break with previous thought patterns. One only need look at 9/11 for a demonstration of his thesis. In *Metapolitics*, Badiou moves from terror's obfuscation to its politics and posits that terrorism is characteristically "unintelligible and unthinkable. Considered in isolation, terror becomes an infra-political datum, one that is politically unthinkable, thereby leaving the terrain wide open for moralistic preaching" (138). Precisely due to terrorism's devastating and unthinkable nature, it is the essence of something that

provokes confusion and acts to create a void of meaning. Thus, the meaning can be filled with political rhetoric favored by the corporate media and constructed into a spectacle. The spectacle constructs unified meaning out of the multiplicity in direct opposition to an event. If fidelity were to take place, the pieces would emerge from the dusty aftermath in the days, weeks, and months following the event. However, the current pace of society does not allow for such investigation. Terrorist events require another type of fidelity that treats the “unintelligible and unthinkable” aspect of the event as primary to its subsequent portrayal.

The media spectacle acts as the “state” of terrorism and has a dual meaning that at once refers to how the spectacle unifies meaning as well as to how the State, as in the governmental body of a nation, portrays the situation. In either sense, the state takes the multiplicities of any terrorist event and forecloses them under a single name, forcing a meaning onto the situation. Badiou explains how the “*state of the situation*” is “that by means of which the structure of a situation – of any structured presentation whatsoever – is counted as one” (*Being and* 95). It contains the same function as the media spectacle when it counts all of the parts of an occurrence under a single name and portrays it in a type of totality represented by the name. However, for the terrorist event and events in general, a single name does not apply. The state, in both senses of the term, attempts to codify the single meaning in order to maintain a sense of control over the situation. “The state simultaneously operates a count-as-one of parts and codifies what falls under this count: thus, besides being the master of representation in general, the state is the master of language” (287). It unifies while deciding what the unity means and what fits inside

of its boundaries. It masters representation and what is represented just as the media spectacle does. The political rhetoric that emerges from the political State contains the same power. It fits divergent parts under the name in order to control the representation and the discourse that surrounds the topic.

In order to engage the “state of the situation,” one must be diligent in a search for the parts subsumed under the unity of the spectacle, or the state, and find the contingent truth. “A fidelity ... is not a matter of knowledge. It is not the work of an expert: it is the work of a militant. ‘Militant’ designates equally the feverish exploration of the effects of a new theorem” (329). It is Badiou’s way of saying one must be aggressive when pursuing a revolutionary moment and fight the power to foreclose the meaning of an event. The new truth provoked from the event is much more difficult to find than a simple explanation that fits under a name. The spectacle buys into the normativity of names, and the corporate media uses them to sell infotainment to viewers. However, when “a truth is always that which makes a hole in a knowledge,” it is that much more difficult to sell because people desire explanation rather than absence (327). The authority of the media spectacle lies in its ability to make sense of something that is senseless, even if it forecloses the definition in the process.

For Badiou, evil lies at the heart of a process that will codify under a single name what is essentially multiplicitous and make it seem real to the public. It amounts to the creation of a simulacrum, which for Badiou is the definition of evil. “Evil is the process of a simulacrum of truth. And in its essence, under a name of its invention, it is terror directed at everyone” (*Ethics* 77). Terrorism recreates itself in its ability to reconstruct

reality through its spectacular portrayals. As mentioned earlier, it is Baudrillard who famously tells us that “The spectacle of terrorism forces the terrorism of spectacle upon us,” and also Baudrillard’s concept of simulacrum that allows us to view the way the media spectacle empties things of meaning by substituting images for reality (*Spirit of Terrorism* 30). Badiou finds evil in this outcome and conceives of the event as a process to break through and return to a sense of reality.

Badiou also finds the means to break through totalities and predetermined meanings in the possibilities presented in art. On one hand, art acts as a process of fidelity, presenting for examination the parts of an event in their multiplicity. Art that refuses to define and instead provides another perspective contains an instructive element to it.⁷⁵ It teaches about the powers that define and confine a process with a single name that fills in meaning. In *The Handbook of Inaesthetics*, Badiou explains how “it is art itself that educates, because it teaches of the power of infinity held within the tormented cohesion of a form. Art delivers us from the subjective barrenness of the concept” (3). Concepts define a process by assigning a name to it that does not allow for subjective contingencies to take shape. Art defies this confinement by opening up different angles and challenging the unity of the concept. Various types of art do so mainly through their formal structure that brings together diverse elements in a type of performance that does not attempt to explain and escapes formal definitions.⁷⁶ “Meaning

⁷⁵ Badiou explains what he calls his “*didactic* schema” as a “thesis that art is incapable of truth” (*Handbook of 2*). He means that art does not have the ability to define something but instead sheds light on the processes that construct unified truths.

⁷⁶ I come to this idea through Badiou’s discussion of dance. He argues that “dance would provide the metaphor for the fact that every genuine thought depends upon an event. An

is caught up in the movement ... in its arrangement, and not in its supposed referent, that this movement operates between the eclipse of the subject and the dissolution of the object, and that what this movement produces is an Idea" (30). The movement contained within the work of art allows it to defy objectification in that it defies a unified meaning by its very nature. The interaction with art by an individual brings subjective context to bear that challenges any set meaning. Art defies the confines of a name because it contains openings and gaps that allow for critical engagement.

Literature contains the movement within it to escape the confines of a set referent and form the type of meaning Badiou seeks. Through diverse characters in countless situations, literature portrays the interactions between people and events. The movement comes from the characterizations and the scenes within which those singular characters are placed. Literature demonstrates how various elements combine to create an event and shows how people come to terms with the circumstance. Furthermore, the novel presents the type of sustained engagement that enables a view of how meanings come to be formed through diverse means. In the case of literature about terrorism in the post 9/11 context, texts demonstrate both how the media spectacle determines meaning and how characters confront the spectacle and attempt to piece the elements together in what amounts to fidelity to an event, the terrorist event.

event is precisely what remains undecided between the taking place and the non-place" (*Handbook of* 61). A dance defies a particular name and contains within it a place of making meaning while escaping meaning. Dance poses as a thought that cannot be decided upon simply through its formal structure, the organization of movement that is its performance.

Literature, thus, becomes both the performance of the event and the site of response to the event. Derek Attridge describes this dual nature of literature in terms of being both witness and act of witnessing: “the works in question function in several ways as once, and there is no contradiction involved in saying that, as testimonies, they witness in a powerful manner and at the same time, as literary works, they stage the activity of witnessing” (97). The witness works through an event and, thus, transfers knowledge to the reader enabling a response to the original scene. Literature enacts a story allowing the reader to engage with and, in a complicated manner, perform the situation that otherwise would remain unattainable. The performance brings forth an encounter with otherness and all of the other’s multiplicity that goes unnoticed in our media saturated world. As such, it acts as the site of response to the event, having the unique ability to ask and inspire the difficult questions that a traumatic event necessitates and through story, leave them open to a response from the reader that may not easily equate to an answer. The questions bring out literature’s ability to ethically respond by acknowledging the absence contained within a text. Questions contain a double movement of acknowledging that the text confronts a certain issue and at the same time does not close off the possibilities of the issue.⁷⁷ Questioning allows readers to ask and therefore investigate the gaps that literature leaves in a subject matter. It acts as fidelity through this movement. This is effectively an ethical engagement that cuts through the foreclosure of the spectacle and allows for a response to the event of terrorism.

⁷⁷ As Janette Turner Hospital’s narrator in *The Last Magician* puts it, “Absence is potent, unanswerable questions are the ones that engage us, the silences are thick with story” (174). Questions open avenues for inquiry that initiate a process that finds meaning through the lack of definition.

The ethical engagement acts in the same way Attridge argues reading the text acts as an event. For Attridge, “This is what the literary work ‘is’: an act, an event, of reading, never entirely separable from the act-event (or acts-events) of writing that brought it into being as a potentially readable text, never entirely insulated from the contingencies of the history into which it is projected” (59). Literature, in this sense, becomes a merger of contexts between reader and writer and the culture that surrounds both. It never fully defines because it acknowledges that the narrative gains its authority from the contingencies of the reader’s engagement and the writer’s construction. The text remains a singular construction of both that moves in the balance. The movement calls out for interpretation and refuses to close off possibilities, making it the perfect representation of fidelity. Literature puts forth meaning only in the process of reading that occurs as an interaction between writer and reader.⁷⁸

The novel presents the type of singularity and multiplicity needed to confront foreclosure and allows for an ethical engagement to take shape. Andrew Gibson argues that the “novelist presents us with individuality and diversity alike without any attempt to reduce either to the terms of a singular scheme or totality” (8). The novel defies the confines of the spectacle by presenting elements in their multiplicitous form. The text represents the type of ethical engagement sought by the event because it allows for individual responses to take shape through an interaction with others, recognizing their

⁷⁸ Attridge describes how literature’s “singularity lies in the *activation* of these unfurling meanings, in the experience” (69). It depicts how the act of reading brings about the process of making meaning in a text.

humanity in the process.⁷⁹ Gordon argues that the novel acts as a means for witnessing an ethics of the event. He explains how “the event cannot be predicated beforehand, as it has no preordained structure and is not reducible to prior rules, so an ethics of the event will evidently not be a question of ethics as already given, but will be intrinsic to the event itself” (134). Gordon finds an ethics in the interaction, without predeterminations. The novel at once depicts these interactions and places the reader in an interaction with the text. It confronts the preconceptions of the spectacle in this double movement. Foreclosure represents the opposite of this ethics of the event and, therefore, is at odds with literature.

Contemporary novels about terrorism take up this opposition by confronting both terrorism and the media spectacle that forecloses it. Terrorism forces a particular idea on the public through a violent act that is conveyed by the corporate media. Literature opens the foreclosure to provoke responses that open the social and political dialogue about terrorism. Margaret Scanlan, however, puts the issue differently: “In the imagined act of terrorism, a writer may assess his or her own political commitments, actions, and failures. Thus the terrorist novel opens itself up to more general questions about the writer’s ability to understand, respond to, and influence politics” (7). Scanlan questions the writer’s ability to influence political power structures while acknowledging that the writer may not have a privileged perspective on the topic. Both are valid considerations

⁷⁹ Gordon explains how the novel “becomes the form for and expression of an ethics of free, democratic pluralism” (8). It allows for identities to take shape and things to be decided upon by the reader, amounting to an ethics that acknowledges the other’s singularity. He works from a Levinasian standpoint, see *Totality and Infinity*, that finds ethical engagement in the face of the other by recognizing the other’s humanity.

of the limits of the writers influence, but I try to find productive possibilities in these constraints. I find Scanlan's questioning of the writer's ability to "understand" and "respond to" terrorism as an opportunity to acknowledge how contemporary writers engage with the subject matter in an ethical manner and do not attempt to represent a terrorist incident holistically or even realistically. Writers respond by opening the gaps inherent in the terrorist event.

The post 9/11 landscape provides fertile ground for writers to engage the media spectacle and bring art in contact with the reality of terrorism. Never has there been an event so perfectly staged for media coverage and on such a grand scale. The global information networks offered an audience nobody could have imagined previously. Frank Lentricchia and Jody McAuliffe controversially link the tragedy to performance art: "The suicide terrorists who struck New York may be said to have made – with the cooperation of American television – performance art with political designs on its American audience" (13). They link art and terrorism literally through how they are staged as a performance, and figuratively as they both present events that bring art in contact with reality.⁸⁰ Lentricchia and McAuliffe present a way of making sense of reality by thinking of it as art. It exists in the same vein as the Sidipan hostage ordeal where the footage appeared to viewers as a reality TV program and the experience of the hostages was compared to that of a movie. While putting reality TV into the category of art is a bit of a stretch, they both represent the way the media spectacle takes over for

⁸⁰ They go on to explain the link. "Thanks to the presence of the camera, which guaranteed a vast audience, this act of performance *means* something, achieves the paradoxical fusion of 'life' and 'art,' and 'event'" (14).

reality and creates a simulacrum. The images refer back to themselves and become contentless, able to be filled in by the dominant discourse of the corporate media, influenced by politicians. In making their comparison Lentricchia and McAuliffe make a key mistake; they put performance art into the category of the spectacle and fail to find the productive possibilities that art offers as an event.⁸¹

Literature provides the means to see a terrorist act as an event, seeing through the foreclosure of the media spectacle in what amounts to an ethical engagement. Novels pay attention to the absences inherent to all events and draw attention to the foreclosures that occur.⁸² Texts do this by questioning the processes that close off response and open avenues for others to respond. Maurice Blanchot describes how the text “becomes that which unfurls, that which *quickens*, the *blossoming* of the apotheosis” (225). The literary text comes forth out of the event itself through the process of fidelity, and in doing so becomes the example of how to approach an event. It is an ethical engagement in the way it allows for the singular and multiple processes to come to light, responds to the event, and enables the responses of others.

⁸¹ In *Crimes of Art and Terror*, they link artists and terrorists in a way that renders both devoid of meaning.

⁸² Maurice Blanchot explains that in the wake of a disaster the “writer no longer belongs to the magisterial realm where to express oneself means to express the exactitude and the certainty of things” (26). Writers search for other means of understanding the disaster that allows for the gaps and absences that occur.

CHAPTER III

GLOBAL FORECLOSURES AND EXCEPTIONS

“The force of the explosion was a noise she had never heard before, a sound that was a personal attack, a statement of purpose both obscene and emphatic, whose meaning was unmistakable” (Ragen 225). Julia Greenberg is a foreign correspondent for a fictitious news agency modeled on the BBC in Naomi Ragen’s *The Covenant*. Ragen portrays Julia as a self-serving journalist out to further her career by consistently demonstrating a Palestinian bias in her coverage of the Middle East conflict, the current trend of the international news media that is leading to a shift against Israel in world opinion, according to Ragen. Her obvious distaste for the way international journalism shapes opinion of her adopted homeland comes through in her depiction of the explosion, a suicide bombing, in which Julia becomes victim and unequivocal witness to a terrorist attack.⁸³ Ragen rips the setting directly from the headlines and depicts an explosion on King George Street, the site of numerous suicide bombings throughout the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, in order to appropriate the media spectacle that surrounds such events. The spectacle makes the meaning “unmistakable” by codifying the attack as “obscene” and “emphatic” (224). In her description, Ragen evokes the image of “baby carriage wheels and a bottle” to shape the reader’s reaction to the scene and close down any interpretation other than that of being a heinous act. She uses gory fragmented

⁸³ Ragen moved from the U.S. to Israel over thirty years ago.

descriptions of “Someone’s arm,” “Half a head,” and “blood, blood everywhere” to equate to the media’s use of shocking video clips that do not respond to the attack in a meaningful way and create quick emotional judgments in viewers (225). The scene represents Regan’s appropriation of the media spectacle, a construct that is juxtaposed against Julia’s experience of the attack.⁸⁴

As explained in the previous chapter, the spectacle forecloses the meaning of what it portrays. The media spectacle constitutes the audiences understanding by providing dramatic images that dominate the discourse surrounding a terrorist attack and prevent engagement by acting as the lone reference point. One of the main characteristics of the spectacle is that it unifies disparate elements of a situation in order to construct a single narrative or idea that defines the circumstance.

Ragen’s scene creates a spectacle reminiscent of those of the media in order to confront it and create an opening in the foreclosed discourse surrounding terror attacks.⁸⁵ Ragen symbolically blows-up the corporate media by putting the corrupt journalist at the center of a bombing, corrupt because she uses a Palestinian bias to earn ratings and subsequent promotion. However, her actions and the meaning of terrorism become clear to Julia as she falls victim to the attack; a point Ragen drives home by

⁸⁴ I am using Guy Debord’s idea of the spectacle that he puts forth in *The Society of the Spectacle*.

⁸⁵ Foreclosure refers to ceasing the dialogue that attempts to come to terms with the diverse articulations of a concept or situation in favor of the hegemonic discourse that defines it once and for all. It acts as a kind of “suture” as Laclau and Mouffe use the term, as tying a subject to a certain discourse that effectively fills in the subject and does not account for the essential lack (88). Foreclosure functions in a similar way but with regard to a concept, covering over any sense of absence and closing down its meaning in favor of a single discourse.

moving in and out of the journalist's personal perspective during the explosion. Regan shifts into the first person as she attempts to tunnel into the journalist's experience, while shifting back to the third person to register the emotions that the author wants to convey to the reader: "My ears, my head, my blue eyes, my body. For the first time, she [Julia] was terrified" (226). The narrative shift conveys the sense of a confession or an admission on the part of the journalist. Regan's reference to the "body" suggests there is an embodied reality to the event, privileging the direct experience of being there that cannot be conveyed through a news media that uses terms like "freedom fighters," "activists," and "militants," all used previously by Julia to describe the perpetrators (71). After the explosion, Julia comes to a different understanding about "Terrorism. To instill terror. Yes. That word. The perfect word for who they are and what they do. Terrorists" (226).⁸⁶ The shift in Julia's understanding demonstrates how the attack interrupted her own idea of what terrorism meant and how her previous bias was unfounded. Instead of buying into the current trend in the corporate media, she now comes to her own conclusion regardless of the politics and any consideration of audience. The news media as commodity, selling a story, gives way to the reality of the situation on the ground in a terrorist attack. This example highlights the key themes that international writers proffer to engage contemporary terrorism.

⁸⁶ The story is told from a decidedly Israeli perspective. Calling it terrorism reinstitutes the foreclosure of the spectacle instead of open up a discussion of it. Either way, Julia actually experiencing the event and altering her perspective shows how direct involvement differs from media representation. The corporate media does not pay attention to the nuances of the meaning of terrorism that Walter Laquer, Bruce Hoffman, Joseba Zulaika and William Douglas, and almost every other terrorism specialist argue is contained within the term.

Contemporary writers appropriate the media spectacle of terrorism in order to confront the foreclosure it carries out and to open a space for response. This global literature not only responds, but it offers the potential for others, for readers, to respond as well.⁸⁷ In this chapter, I examine how Richard Flanagan, Ian McEwen, and Moshin Hamid respond to the corporate media's precarious foreclosure of terrorism by attempting to reclaim a space where individuals can respond by focusing on the limit cases indicative of the *logic of the exception* that prevails in contemporary life.⁸⁸ The texts make visible the extent to which normative society is defined by the exception.⁸⁹ Each writer appropriates the spectacle of terrorism to demonstrate that media presentations of terrorist events close down the critical distance that allows for meaningful deliberation and manifest meanings to emerge. The corporate media effectively forecloses response by selling a story whose meaning is packaged in advance and according to pre-existing scripts. However, contemporary writers treat terrorism as an *event* in order to open the ability to respond both to cataclysmic experience and to the

⁸⁷ I am using insight from Kelly Oliver and tying it to the literary. She argues, "we have an obligation not only to respond but also to respond in a way that opens up rather than closes off the possibility of response by others" (*Witnessing* 18). This interaction opens up the ethical relationship. I argue that literature provides this opportunity, and it is a critical factor in an ethical engagement with literature.

⁸⁸ Giorgio Agamben describes how the exceptional cases have defined the norms in contemporary society by using examples from the War on Terrorism. In *State of Exception*, he explains how these cases act as thresholds that create exceptions to the normal rules and laws of society, but the exceptions become the rule and stay in place even after the situation is resolved.

⁸⁹ This represents the application of Agamben's State of Exception, which he defines in terms of law but has a more general relevance. "The state of exception is not a special kind of law (like the law of war); rather, insofar as it is a suspension of the juridical order itself, it defines law's threshold or limit concept" (*State of Exception* 4). Therefore, the exception makes visible the threshold.

media spectacle that forecloses the topic.⁹⁰ Critical theorist Bill Readings explains, “An event is an occurrence, as such...the event is the fact or case that something happens, after which nothing will ever be the same again. The event disrupts any pre-existing referential frame within which it might be represented or understood” (xxx). I apply this understanding to terrorism in order to show how it needs to be understood as such to open critical engagement.

The writers examined in this chapter each approach the issue from a different angle. Richard Flanagan provides a bleak look at how fear manifests itself in society through the corporate media and constructs the identity of an individual. McEwen sets a scene of terror against the backdrop of resisting the mainstream discourse in order to show how one person can challenge the corporate media’s rhetoric. Moshin Hamid follows one man’s enlightenment as he witnesses a terrorist attack and comes to a new realization about the course of his life. Each opens a space for response and responsibility in a time when the media spectacle of terrorism produces unified meaning. The logic of the spectacle inhibits engagement with terrorism by simply coloring it as the evil enemy.⁹¹ While not condoning terror’s strategies as such, this literature creates a space political and ethical engagement. Each text challenges the existing points of reference to reinstitute ethical response and response-ability.

⁹⁰ Response and “response-ability,” allowing a space for others to respond as well, enable “working-through rather than merely the repetition of trauma and violence,” according to Oliver (*Witnessing* 18). It allows individuals to come to terms with a violent act rather than reenact its harmful qualities.

⁹¹ Debord explains: “The spectacle appears at once as society itself, as a part of society and as a means of unification. As a part of society, it is that sector where all attention, all consciousness, converges” (12). It forms a logic of its own around the principles of unification and convergence.

The texts confront the *logic of the exception* through the way the spectacle of terrorism subordinates individual responsibility in pursuit of security that ultimately produces fear.⁹² The “state of exception,” in Giorgio Agamben’s terms, derives from an emergency declaration by a government to suspend the normal rule of law. The government, contradictorily, obtains this power from the very law it suspends.⁹³ This extreme that causes the invocation of the emergency state, a “limit-case” in Agamben’s terms, becomes the impetus for producing new laws and norms that dictate how everyone lives in a society. Thus, the extreme condition forms a threshold that dictates how the rest of the population lives, making the state of exception the norm. The exception also applies to individuals that live in the contradictory place of being defined by the law as outside the law.⁹⁴ The illegal immigrant and the suspected but not charged terrorist being held indefinitely both embody the position of the exception. This logic, which Kelly Oliver argues “makes some lives valuable and other lives worthless,” is the “fundamental logic of the war against terror” (*Women as* 134).⁹⁵ Furthermore, the logic

⁹² Anthropologist Ghassan Hage explains how the “search for zero vulnerability produces a gaze that sees threats everywhere and ends up reproducing the very vulnerability it is supposedly trying to overcome” (81). It ultimately produces fear, fulfilling the goal of the terrorists.

⁹³ Giorgio Agamben’s *State of Exception* describes this space in legal terms as the “legal form of what can’t have legal form” (1). It initially appears when somebody lies outside of the law but is defined as outside by the law, putting them both inside and outside at the same time. The “exception” allows us to see how laws are formed based on the limit states or extreme cases. It subjects everyone to extreme rules, just like the war on terrorism where laws are derived to prevent the extreme from occurring, but the laws change everyday life. In this sense, the exception becomes the norm and effectively forecloses every other possibility.

⁹⁴ The prisoners/detainees at Guantanamo Bay are a perfect example of the term.

⁹⁵ Oliver derives the idea from a reading of Giorgio Agamben’s *State of Exception* in which he explains how the exception has become the norm, a state in which we found

of the exception goes hand in hand with the media spectacle of terrorism in that it institutes a single discourse from an extreme point of view. I argue that each of the texts in this chapter depicts in this exceptional position, but from different perspectives, in order to confront a corporate media that exploits the extreme, producing a culture based on fear.

From diverse geographical locations, the texts represent an international engagement that confronts the confluence of the corporate media and terrorism. I argue that the international media spectacle of terrorism exists concurrently and represents a transnational threat, one that moves through and beyond borders traveling along networks and infiltrating cultures through its instantaneous reach around the world. Global media networks broadcast incidents in a specific geographic location to a global audience and perpetuate international fear. Flanagan, McEwan, and Hamid each demonstrate how fear permeates their respective cultures. Their novels refer back to the images of 9/11 that crossed borders and traveled the globe immediately after the attack. The similarities in the approaches of these texts indicates that media globalization shrinks the gap between countries to make the spectacle of terrorism a transnational phenomenon, influenced across borders by political happenings anywhere. This transnationality has a generalizing effect that homogenizes local specificities and plays into the hand of the corporate media's narrative arc. Borders are permeable to fear, and populations are prepared to react in similar fashions. However, these literary texts emphasize difference in the political and populous contexts of cities around the world.

new laws based on limits set by those that exist in a state both inside and outside of the law.

Each text provides a unique glimpse into a specific locale, providing needed context in direct contrast to generalizations that would enable foreclosure of meaning. They create openings in the prevailing narrative regarding terrorism that enable ethical responses. These texts engage the spectacle to indicate its global foreclosure of meaning and to reproduce singularities of experience.

The corporate media easily transcends national boundaries and takes the spectacle of terrorism to the world. For Guy Debord, “THE WORLD THE SPECTACLE holds up to view is at once *here* and *elsewhere*; it is the world of the commodity ruling over all lived experience” (26). There is a presence conveyed by the images that allows them to be mastered by the rhetoric that accompanies them.⁹⁶ The corporate media as a commodity rules over the world of thought when it puts a spectacle into play to be consumed by the public, globally. Debord argues that the spectacle functions the same way a commodity functions, by creating an artificial presence that instills desire through an appearance.⁹⁷ The drive is to possess the image as one would possess a commodity, and possessing the image means mastering it. The media offers a perception of knowledge and mastery, allowing viewers to possess what lies in front of them, the image, even though the reality and truth of a situation lies elsewhere. The texts in this chapter compare the media spectacle of terrorism to the commodity spectacle in a

⁹⁶ Media expert Douglas Kellner adds to this point by expanding on how the spectacle captures attention. “Spectacles of terror thus use dramatic images and montage to catch the attention, hoping thereby to catalyze unanticipated events that will spread” (27).

⁹⁷ Debord explains how the “present stage, in which social life is completely taken over by the accumulated products of the economy, entails a generalized shift from *having* to *appearing*” (16). Appearances take over the capitalist economy and institute specific desires that change social life.

way that links the two around the globe.⁹⁸ When terrorism uses the same logic of the commodity, it loses its efficacy as a political weapon. Writers engage terrorism to breakdown the spectacle and allow for the singularity of violent events.

Flanagan's Fearful Engagement

In 2004, Richard Flanagan worried: "A subtle fear has entered Tasmanian public life; it stifles dissent and is conducive to the abuse of power. To question or to comment is to invite the possibility of ostracism and unemployment" ("Uniting Against" n.p.). The Tasmanian writer made these remarks in an article written for the British newspaper *The Guardian*, where he accuses the Tasmanian government of collusion in the island's logging industry. On Flanagan's home island, old growth forests were being clear cut by corporations exporting hardwood chips. Flanagan felt the destruction of the forests amounted to an ecological disaster and a waste of Tasmania's most enduring legacy, the uncut forests that bring tourists from around the world, reduce greenhouse effects, and give the island its ecological identity. He also linked government figures directly to the Gunns Corporation, Australia's largest logging company holding a monopoly in Tasmania. Flanagan's embrace of the cause did not surprise readers of his first three novels, as they all have close ties to the Tasmanian landscape and natural wonders of the island. However, the political fallout of the article did come as a surprise. Flanagan was

⁹⁸ For Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, the commodity and media spectacles are linked to construct a new economic empire. "The development of communications networks has an organic relationship to the emergence of the new world order" (32). The order is one of the dominance of multi-national capital.

mentioned in Parliament by the Tasmanian Premier, Jim Bacon, and discussed at length by the Tasmanian Resources Minister who accused him of damaging the economic interests of the island. Flanagan's article had its intended effect, turning the eyes of the global media onto the island and the ecological disaster being undertaken by the likes of the Gunns Corporation among others.

But Flanagan's success in bringing attention to the issue led to local backlash as the corporate media parroted the government's line and criticized the author, telling the once heralded native son that they did not want him or his books any longer. Local news presented a new persona of the author, describing him as betraying the interests of Tasmania and misrepresenting the logging industry. The corporate media characterized him as a Tasmanian traitor and attempted to undermine his ability to respond to the ecological disaster, and to silence Flanagan. However, he did not remain silent. He turned to the very source of the turmoil, the mainstream media, and spoke out in a Melbourne newspaper, *The Age*, about how the Tasmanian government "introduced a climate of fear into Tasmania," and defended his Tasmanian loyalty by reminding readers of his rough upbringing and local heritage ("Paradise Lost" n.p.). Flanagan experienced first-hand how the corporate media used fear to alter his public persona, creating one that did not resemble the author or the work he had done writing about Tasmania.⁹⁹ By creating an exception of him, corporate media supported the institution of policies designed for fiscal profit. The pervasive fear of contemporary culture, its

⁹⁹ Flanagan's previous novels *Gould's Book of Fish*, *The Sound of One Hand Clapping*, and *Death of a River Guide* all deal with specific Tasmanian issues and have created a literary profile for the island.

perpetuation by the power of the corporate media, and how it recreates identities would prove to be the impetus for Flanagan's next work, *The Unknown Terrorist* (2006).

In a short piece on Flanagan's website entitled "Writing the *Unknown Terrorist*," he explains his inspiration for the book. He describes what bothered him most about the controversy with the Gunns Corporation "was the way the media seemed more than happy to run with the government spin with almost no questioning of it" (2). The corporate media discarded its traditional role as investigator in lieu of maintaining strong relationships with government officials and circulating their view of the controversy. This realization led Flanagan to see the same thing occurring on a larger scale with regard to terrorism and how the corporate media's coverage of terrorism adopts the logic of the exception. The limit-case that forms the exception forecloses opinions, making the society of the spectacle a place in which the exception rules. It creates a culture of fear, unable to respond to the media spectacle of terrorism because the corporate media constantly holds up the extreme case. It was not his story he wanted to tell, but a story everyone could embrace. He "wanted it to be a Trojan horse of a book" that would enable people to "once more begin to think and question" (5-6).

Flanagan's latest novel derives from the context of the writer's personal controversy to explore the way the corporate media capitalizes on public concerns about terrorism. He constructs a story and a new identity of one woman, "the Doll," as a terrorist that has no basis in reality. The text links the corporate, the political, and the media to show the links between the three in creating an extreme case out of the woman,

an exception, used to institute new policies and practices.¹⁰⁰ The media construction amounts to a spectacle that forecloses identity based on fear and unwittingly colludes with the media spectacle of terrorism. The turn to terrorism allows Flanagan to directly target the most powerful mechanisms of foreclosure in contemporary Australian society. The text foregrounds how the corporate media perpetuates terrorism, making it more effective rather than countering its influence.

Flanagan challenges readers to examine in a new light the culture of fear that persists in the face of terrorism. He exploits the tactics of the corporate media in order to foreground questions about how different media outlets work in the same way and with the same motive.¹⁰¹ It is a story of foreclosure that demonstrates how the fear mongering mechanisms of society, the corporate media and the government, can vilify one person and position her as the extreme in order to serve their own purposes.

The text interrogates the spectacle of terrorism to confront the mechanisms of foreclosure in contemporary Australia. Flanagan utilizes a local context, Sydney, to envision how the media spectacle changes the life of one of its citizens and the cultural fear that makes it impossible for that individual to become anything but what the corporate media desires. The novel explores the nuances of how the fear of transnational terrorism dominates the local imagination. Even though Australia has been relatively

¹⁰⁰ The exception defines the limit or extreme that is held up in opposition to the norm, in Agamben's definition. It allows for changes to take place to defend against that extreme position. Those changes then become the norm, constructing the norms of a society according to the extreme.

¹⁰¹ "Welcome to media for profit, where the fundamental principle is to attract an audience to sell to advertisers" (6). This statement by media theorists David Croteau and William Hoynes depicts the environment I refer to.

secure, fear becomes the primary mechanism through which the people view the world, and it is used to define every aspect of those around them. In the *Unknown Terrorist*, “People like fear. We all want to be frightened and we all want somebody to tell us how to live” (166). The text confronts this fear by taking on “the politicians and the security forces and the journalists, who, instead of protecting people, also betrayed them” (186). Flanagan observes how fear is the means through which the unknown becomes palpable in a time of uncertainty, and when societal forces capitalize on fear, art needs to go beyond the foreclosure of the media to critically engage the spectacle of terrorism, bringing about an ethical discourse that allows people to work-through terror.¹⁰²

By focusing on a woman, Flanagan also engages the cultural stigmas that fear the power of femininity. The title of the text refers to a stripper, the Doll, who is being sought by the police and portrayed by the news media as a terrorist. Her sexuality and femininity are front and center throughout the text and the way the corporate media constructs her. In *Women as Weapons of War*, Kelly Oliver explains how women and female sexuality have been represented as dangerous weapons and threatening to their male counterparts. There is a mystic surrounding the ability to seduce a man that feeds the fear of women being used as a weapon. Oliver argues, female sexuality “becomes more threatening because we imagine that it can be wielded by women to manipulate

¹⁰² I refer here to Dominick LaCapra’s concept of working through as opposed to acting out traumatic experiences. In *History in Transit*, he explains “Working-through is itself an articulatory practice that counteracts the compulsive effects of post-traumatic symptoms without trying to achieve full mastery or total consciousness of past traumas” (15). It articulates a type of response that does not pretend to define or repeat the event, but allows an individual to come to terms with what occurred.

men; it can become the art of seduction through which women beguile and intoxicate to control and even destroy men” (*Women as* 32). Oliver references both pop culture, “Hollywood’s femme fatale” (*Women as* 32), and current events, the fascination with “women involved in Abu Ghraib” (*Women as* 30), to make her point. The Doll threatens culture in the way Oliver describes, by fitting into a pre-existing script about a women’s threat that does not allow for multiple interpretation. It forecloses her identity in advance by forming a link between the corporate media’s portrayal of her and what the audience expects. Oliver sees the link in the way cultural industries represent women’s sexuality as “abject, both terrifying and fascinating at the same time” (*Women as* 30). A woman that provides both life and care as a mother and brings death and destruction as a suicide bomber grabs public attention in a unique way. This case situates the feminine as the exception. The contradiction of giving life and bringing death invokes a new level of fear by re-asserting the old script of women as threat. It is a foreclosure of meaning that literature attempts to open by providing new narratives, new scripts. The threat exists to a culture still steeped in traditional gender roles and stereotypes that define what a woman’s role should be. Any break with the system invokes a new type of fear seen as more damaging than others. Oliver contends that “it is crucial for women to be able to create new meanings for their lives outside of patriarchal conventions that continue to link women, sex, and death. Otherwise, women’s freedom is reduced to the freedom to kill themselves” (*Women as* 40). Women must confront a culture that creates fear in the breakdown of patriarchal roles. In doing so, women garner recognition, voice, and subsequently subjectivity that enables direct response to the mechanisms of foreclosure.

Flanagan's exploration of women in the discourse of terrorism builds on his continuing commitment to understanding gender. Fiona Polack explores Flanagan's singular perspective on female subjectivity in which he constructs a particular version of femininity dependent upon a specific locale. Polack argues that "notions of gender intersect with those of space" in Flanagan's *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* (182).¹⁰³ It amounts to a "response to the long-held binary oppositions connecting women with mainly confined and stable spaces, including the traditional home ... privileging a nomadic female subject" (183). Polack's idea is that female identity can recreate itself in different locales in diverse ways dislodging binary understandings of gender. Her argument focuses on the in-between spaces that deconstruct the narratives upon which

¹⁰³ Critics have paid particular attention to aspects of Flanagan's past works that resonate with *The Unknown Terrorist*. Adi Wimmer argues that Flanagan is part of Australia's movement toward multiculturalism. Wimmer demonstrates how for most of the 20th century Australia was seen as searching for a particular national identity that circulated around the rugged white male. In the 1990's, the idea of diversity came to the literary forefront in order to showing a more complete version of Australian identity and challenging the decidedly white center with alternative historical views. Flanagan's *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* fits into this movement by asking, according to Wimmer, "what would the historiography of post-war Australia be like without the contribution of low-paid immigrant labor?" (132). It amounts to a recovery of the lost voice of the immigrant. Celia Wallhead argues that Flanagan affects the same question in *Gould's Book of Fish*. She argues that the novel is an "attempt to give a voice to the hitherto silenced Aborigines, and create individual figures instead of stereotypes" (283). It amounts to an attempt to unlock a singular identity from the group label, Aborigines, and offer subjectivity by allowing those individuals to respond in their own voice. Marion Gymnich and Alexandre Segao Costa argue that Flanagan attempts to raise new questions about the hegemonic discourse surrounding animals. They explain that *Gould's Book of Fish* has the "potential to raise questions about the relationship between human beings and animals" and "challenge culturally dominant assumptions about animals as the 'other' of humankind" (69). Once again, these critics argue that Flanagan attempts to open a fixed discourse by challenging it and opening new questions. Each time, Flanagan's effort amounts to recognizing the voice of a subordinate group and shedding light on singular understandings in order to allow individual voices to come to the forefront.

traditional gender roles are founded. Flanagan's work carries this deconstruction out by recreating gender across various times periods and in different ways to show diversity, changes, and detachment from a traditional gender role. By approaching the cultural construct of female sexuality in his latest work, he performs the same type of detachment from the traditional narrative by questioning the authenticity of the mechanisms in society that fail to recognize individuality.¹⁰⁴

The Unknown Terrorist appropriates the aesthetic of infotainment to create an ideology-of-form, a meaning contained within the structure of the text.¹⁰⁵ In his previous novels, Flanagan has also used this exact strategy in which the organization of the text conveys a distinct idea.¹⁰⁶ Flanagan structures the *Unknown Terrorist* to convey the

¹⁰⁴ Prior to *The Unknown Terrorist*, Flanagan attempted to give recognition to unrecognized segments of Tasmanian culture in other texts. In *Gould's Book of Fish*, it was the idea of Tasmania as a penal colony and the perception of the descendents as the legacy of the convicts that he confronted. In *The Sound of One Hand Clapping*, Flanagan brings light to the struggle of Slovenian immigrants in the early 20th century who have all but been forgotten. The latter text attempts to restore a vision of the immigrant community that enables a sense of self and empower responses to the past that go beyond the existing ideas of immigrants as "always outside, unable to enter" (115). These are Bojan Buloh's sentiments, the immigrant protagonist who struggles to create a home for his daughter and earn enough money to live a life outside of the pub. His story is one of an individual separated from society as "Once he had been able to find within even his broken self the thing, the mystery that he shared with all other men and women." (41) However, "that thing was gone ... and all he had left was one terrifying certainty, that he was no longer a man, but fragments exploding ever outwards" (41). Flanagan attempts to connect the fragments into a story that enables responses to the plight of Slovene immigrants and restores a sense of identity to those same people.

¹⁰⁵ I am arguing that Flanagan organizes the text to convey a specific meaning. He purposely structures the novel in a way that attempts to bring out an idea.

¹⁰⁶ Mirko Jurak describes how *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* intertwines the past and present to show the causal relationship between the two. It combines dreams of the future with memories of the past in an effort to examine where the characters are going from where they have come. According to Jurak, "The theme of the novel is not only counterbalanced, but it has counterpoints skillfully and tightly interspersed throughout

confusion he sees in the corporate media. Reviewers get stuck on the opening chapter as it takes place outside of the storyline and stands out from the text. It amounts to two pages appearing as an epigraph to the rest of the text that is organized into sections representing days of the week. Magdalena Ball believes that “It might have helped the novel a little to eliminate the opening chapter, which sets a confusing and unpleasant tone to the book” (n.p.). The review misses the point of the opening chapter, which is to do exactly what Ball describes, create a tone of confusion and unpleasantness. John Tague gets more to the point when he argues that “*The Unknown Terrorist* is a blunt work, often flawed. But the flaws, I think, are the point” (n.p.). The initial two pages adopt the form of a TV news story opening or preview.¹⁰⁷ Flanagan appropriates this aesthetic to elicit the same sentiment. If Magdalena Ball is a representative reader, the chapter serves to confuse and disturb the reader, and considering John Tague’s argument, it is a blunt invocation of these sentiments.

The opening chapter delivers controversial ideas and refers to unanswerable questions in its effort to mirror the media’s use of music and graphics. It begins with a line echoed throughout the text, “THE IDEA THAT LOVE IS NOT ENOUGH” (1). The idea stands in the face of dreamers and romantics who believe that all they need is love,

the whole novel” (18). The counterpoints create a deliberative effect that debates the past within the text to open the historical narrative with new questions. The past and present are not mutually exclusive; they each reflect upon the other to create new understandings. The process attends to the connections between the past and present and how each challenges the assumptions of the other in a manner that changes over time. *Death of a River Guide*, Flanagan’s first novel, utilizes the same strategy. As a river guide drowns, he envisions his past in light of his impending death, demonstrating how his perspective of the past is as fluid as the water under which he is stuck.

¹⁰⁷ Infotainment specializes in constructing dramatic introductions using music and moving graphics associated with the feeling the corporate media intends to convey.

to quote the cliché, or that any problem can be solved through interpersonal relationships. The opening initiates the blunt force of the text to stand in the face of idealism and show a horrific world that is contemporary Sydney. The narrator then links the idea of love to Jesus and how “In his understanding that love was not enough, in his acceptance of the necessity of the sacrifice of his own life to enable the future of those around him, Jesus is history’s first, but not last, example of a suicide bomber” (2). The idea links love, Jesus, and terrorism in a decidedly controversial way that is simply meant to provoke. Jesus does not play a role in the remainder of the text, nor is light shed on how the comment plays into the story to come. It is provocative and incendiary to the point that it opens controversy from the initial pages. The opening chapter closes with a contradictorily ambiguous and insightful paragraph:

But then, ideas always miss the point. Chopin could offer no explanations of his Nocturnes. Why the Doll was haunted by Chopin’s Nocturnes is one strand of this story. In listening to what Chopin could not explain, she heard an explanation of her own life. She could, of course, not know that it also foretold her own death. (2)

This opening hints at the mystery behind art’s aesthetic power, and the lack of explanation for diverse responses to it. It also foreshadows the impending doom of the protagonist, Doll, linking her inability to know her own fate to the inability to definitively define art. The reader is privy to inside information in this foreshadowing, exploiting the same type of triggering effect media introductions have. The introductions dispel the mystery of what is to come by evoking a specific sentiment and setting the

tone for the entire story. But while adopting the media technique, Flanagan complicates its effect. Art is not knowable from the outset. Singular responses substitute for simple explanations and the lingering effect of this single work of art forces thought and careful consideration rather than immediate understanding. As much as the opening chapter mirrors the corporate media introductions, it also confronts their means of foreclosure by creating confusion instead of certainty and provoking gut reactions instead of perpetuating preconceived sentiments.

The conclusion to the text amounts to the other end of the bookend with the first chapter. It returns to the bleak tone and foreboding atmosphere where the text began. “Nothing was left to balance the horror of life. Power and money were what were to be admired as life atrophied” (316). It reiterates the mood that was set at the outset as well as the point that was redoubled throughout the text, “Love is never enough, but it is all we have” (316). It forms a conclusion to the story of a woman in whose life nobody can intervene once the corporate media decides to determine it. Love, friendship, or any other force of society cannot help her. The destruction of a single life by the fear mongering of the corporate media takes place between the bookends.

The body of the text is organized by days of the week, Saturday to Tuesday, to show the speed with which the foreclosure takes hold of the aptly named protagonist. It takes four days for the corporate media to spin the Doll as a terrorist and recreate her identity by treating her as if she is caught in a kind of game. The chapters are filled with the repetition of headlines from various media outlets that are ubiquitous in Sydney. The Doll cannot escape the voices, images, and stories that define her. The news moves too

quickly and is all consuming to the point where it only takes a short time to destroy an individual.

The corporate media treats this unnamed woman as if she truly is a doll, a child's toy caught in the midst of a terrible game. The game is either corporate culture that puts new fashion trends in storefront windows that she feels she must have, or it is high-class society that she desires to be part of and will dress the part, as in dressing a doll, to join it. However, the name brand handbags and sunglasses cover her body but do not admit her into the elite circles or save her from the corporate media's construction. She is just a toy in the capitalist game where commodities are sold to convey an image. For the Doll, it is a "Louis Vuitton bag" that she sees herself with, "imagining how good it would feel, how in control and purposeful she would look" (46). She buys into the ideology the bag will dress her in, situating her in a different social class by an outward appearance that amounts to a costume. However, it only furthers her role as a toy to be dressed by the society in which she lives. From wearing the commodities, she becomes one, an item sold by the corporate media on the evening news.

The Doll is an unsympathetic character in her own right, making her ripe to become the exception against which contemporary Sydney will define itself against. She is a stripper who knows how to use her body to lure men into giving her money. She sells the appearance of sexuality, the commodification of her body, each night to whoever will give her a tip, but stops short of prostituting herself and selling her entire body. She takes any type of anti-depressant she can get her hands on and does not mind combining them with alcohol or recreational drugs. Flanagan uses these examples to

show how the Doll already fits the idea of a social deviant. It shows how the corporate media can take an unsympathetic individual in the public's eye and easily apply another narrative that fits the character. Flanagan furthers the idea by showing the Dolls lack of any sense of moral or ethical obligation to others. She likes to say, "I'm equally racist about everybody ... but slimy Lebs I really hate" (11). Obviously, Flanagan does not paint her as sympathetic, but he does not separate her from the rest of the city in her initial depiction. The Doll is seen as a product of her environment, just as materialist and selfish as the rest of Sydney. "All of it, she told herself, was about money, to get and to keep money, for all the things that money could buy and for all the things that made her feel" (34). She literally covers herself with cash determining that when it covers her completely, her savings is complete and she can enter the real estate market. Capitalism consumes her, as envisioned by the money covering her body. Instead of responding to the terrible things that surround her, she goes shopping to alleviate her stress. "To be calm, to think, she needed to buy something, anything, and buy it quickly" (148). Consumption gives her the feeling of being empowered when her world is collapsing around her. In that way, she is similar to the rest of Sydney. When the media turns against her, these things which link her to mainstream commodity culture will be used to help define her as an extremist, situating her on the threshold of society.

Flanagan creates a comparison between the Doll and the wealthy residents of Sydney to make a point about the self-absorbed society. The rich are facetiously depicted as "all what Australia was, and all of Australia was as splendid as it was obvious – it was them! It was their success and their prosperity; their mansions and

apartments! Their Porsches and Bentleys and Beemers!” (28). The text depicts self-absorption at its utmost, even to the degree that the wealthy citizens of Sydney relish when somebody else comes to misfortune: “how terrorism – when it happened in other countries – had such a positive effect on Australian real estate prices” (29-30). It does not get any more selfish than to have a group of people that think of “terrorism only in terms of their property prices” (30). Flanagan makes this point to drive home the idea that these people are blind to the happenings of the world and the plight of others. They only care about their own situation because they are caught up in the capitalist mantra of making money and having more. The scene depicts a bleak view of the residents of Sydney, but when in comparison to the Doll, it does not make a judgment based on class. The Doll is just as greedy as the rest of them and will use whatever means possible to join their circle. She purchases expensive and fashionable clothing just to seem as if she is wealthy when she walks down the street.

The only means to break through the self-absorption is fear. Richard Cody, a news anchor for a corporate television station, understands how to use shock and fear as a strategy. At a lunch with a number of Sydney elites, he attempts to ingratiate himself to the group by turning their attention to him using a threatening anecdote. “The era of sentimentality is over ... Our civilization is under attack – why, even an afternoon such as this would be illegal under the new barbarians – neither wine, nor women allowed to dress as they wish” (31). Cody puts fear on the table to turn the group’s attention to him just as he would use it on the evening newscast. He does not care about truth or details, only constructing a story that draws attention. The conversation occurs right as he has

been demoted from his job as anchor to be an investigative reporter. He takes the demotion hard and vows to find a story that will restore his position at the channel. Understanding Cody's lack of ethics when it comes to the truth in a news story leads to the conclusion that Richard Cody represents the corporate media that, in Flanagan's eyes, would do anything for ratings. In the case of this reporter, it is personal, and for many individuals in the news business, it is just the same. The scene further relates the societal relationship with money to the way the corporate media uses its power.

The corporate media uses the Doll as a scapegoat to draw an audience with fear and turns her into the limit-case - the extreme, the exception - by making her the threat to society while living within it. In *The Unknown Terrorist*, the corporate media utilizes its power to create a spectacle that forces an identity on the Doll, that of a terrorist. The spectacle completely inhibits her ability to respond and forces her into the role of the exception, in the contradictory place of being pushed out of society yet being completely defined by that same society. The Doll becomes the threshold through which everyone's fear is defined.¹⁰⁸ Cody acts as the means through which the construction begins, as he sees the Doll at work and later connects her to a surveillance video of a suspected terrorist. The video was taken as the Doll enters the apartment building of an Islamic man, Tariq, with whom she is about to have a seedy one-night-stand. A television news program mistakenly connects Tariq to terrorist training camps and assumes he and those connected to him, the Doll, are terrorist threats. Other Sydney media outlets pick up on

¹⁰⁸ Agamben argues that the State of Exception invokes these thresholds through which people pass to initiate new norms (*State of Exception* 23). In this case, the threshold marks the inception of fear of a terrorist and allows the government to proffer stricter regulation and enforcement of anti-terrorist laws.

the story as it garners more attention. Cody announces the Doll's identity on the news, making the initial claim that she is a terrorist. It is through such a faulty list of connections that Flanagan shows how fear is used to wrap unassuming characters up in a case of mistaken identity. The mechanisms of foreclosure in the society falsely connect her to another identity.

Through the qualities built into its medium, the corporate news is able to construct its subject. A perceived authority allows news anchors to be seen as unbiased truth-tellers to the public.¹⁰⁹ Even Richard Cody is described as "Mr TV ... dully reassuring: always the same and telling you what you already knew" (49). The anchorman reaffirms the normative discourse instead of challenging it and upholds the existing knowledge in the process.¹¹⁰ The newscaster has a demeanor that viewers come to know through time garnering authority through the telling of daily events.¹¹¹ When something unusual occurs, the perception of the news anchor's authority remains the same. Even when the anchor happens to be Richard Cody, a man as contriving as the rest of society, people relate to the tone of voice and the idea that the television news does not lie. Flanagan describes the corporate media personalities, as well as politicians, as "the new gods – the polities and journos, the spinners and shock jocks and op page

¹⁰⁹ Margaret Morse discusses the specific attributes of the news medium that lends authority to the position of the anchor (*Virtualities* 41-43).

¹¹⁰ Margaret Morse explains how the "network news format is a very restrictive rather than inclusive discursive type with a monologic structure that both legitimates and severely limits the subjects produced by the news" (38).

¹¹¹ Morse describes the hierarchy of the news is "arranged around the anchor, who relates the news 'personally,' albeit virtually, to the viewer" (41). It gives authority and trust to the anchor who then has the ability to impart knowledge no matter how true or false.

parasites – playing with the fate of mortals, pointing at shadows of fear and hate on the wall to keep everyone in a cave” (289). These “new gods” represent the people who make knowledge out of the power of their voice instead of finding power through knowledge. It is the same way government agencies are given authority over security matters. A bystander in the text frames this point as a rhetorical question, “Do you seriously think the nation’s top security bodies could have this so wrong?” (264). Viewers do not question the perception and assume that agencies have their best interest in mind.

The novel points out that the voice society grants politicians becomes the truth when the media replays a statement countless times on various outlets and in the 24-hour news cycle. The headlines become omnipresent, appearing in any and every location possible describing the same story from different angles. The repetition and omnipresence of the story drives home this point. When a story is endlessly repeated even with new variations, it becomes familiar and part of the discourse of society. The Doll begins to realize the power of the corporate media when “she surfed the tv, taking none of it in, until she noticed the same security camera footage of Tariq and her on another station, blown up so that their distorted faces filled the screen” (97). This camera focus brings the reader into the scene in order to ask a question: who are these terrorists?¹¹² And Richard Cody gives them what they want by answering the question and clearing up the distortion. His revelation is then picked up by every news outlet in the city and rerun

¹¹² Distorted images that actually take the viewers perspective into the screen as a question, according to Morse: “What is ‘inside’ the television, once a perpendicular subjective high-speed zoom virtually smashes through into the other side of the screen and allows on to bodily enter the symbolic world inside the television set?” (84).

to the point where the Doll feels surrounded by it. The Doll even sees televisions in a storefront window running a story about her, bringing the capitalist environment in the form of a store together with the media. “Doll was staring at the tv, where a politician was talking, with a banner running across the bottom of the screen declaring **TERRORISTS STILL ON RUN. SYDNEY ON HIGH ALERT**” (158). She cannot get away from the madness even in public spaces and especially in the places she normally goes to relieve her stress, the stores. The politician shouting the alarm in the footage guarantees that it will run in the news and garner the requisite authority. Richard Cody put her squarely in the crosshairs of the corporate media’s fear mongering and enables the medium to foreclose her identity by turning her into the exception.

The repetition of images accompanied by other footage amounts to a spectacle forming a relationship to terrorism and further cementing her identity. The infotainment genre often uses file footage that relates to a story forming a connection that carries meaning with it. The juxtaposition of the Doll’s image with those of terrorism positions her as a terrorist for viewers. “The repetitive images clicking over filled the tv like loose change ... The Twin Towers fell again; the same children’s bodies were laid out once more in Beslan; the same man or woman dressed in black brandished the same machine gun; the Doll continued dancing naked” (159). It is a technique of montage where one image produces a context of meaning for another; the sequence and the transition between them provide the meaning. It also posits guilt by association, taking the images and linking them to the Doll. The images tell a story of their own in a culture where visual evidence is privileged and repeated everywhere. The manipulation of the images

adds to the effect, “The Doll disintegrating into dancing squares of colour, herself pixilated, smiling a smile that was never hers” (160). The footage creates an identity that was never hers. The images enact the foreclosure without even a voiceover; they speak for themselves. They amount to a perfect representation of a spectacle where dramatic images in a linked association fill in a desired meaning that has nothing to do with reality. The corporate media panders to its audience by producing more fear and more excitement while linking the Doll to atrocious acts. There is nothing in the Doll’s life to link her to children in Beslan, machine guns, or 9/11. However, the Richard Cody continues these associations in the opening moments of a special he hosts: “Twin towers fell. Bali burnt. Madrid bombing. London bombing. Uniformed police officers. Suited politicians. Robed terrorists. The Doll naked. Missiles. Explosions. Blood. The Doll dissolving” (284). The list becomes more involved each time it is seen in the text and, therefore, more and more damaging to the Doll. The ease with which society picks up on the messages is apparent in the text, conversations overheard in cafes, various media outlets running the story, and seemingly everyone has the opinion that she needs to be taken out. The judgment passed on her moves the Doll into the state of exception in which all deliberative legal processes are suspended, the interpretive corollary of foreclosure. She occupies a place outside of the society, yet completely defined by the very public which condemns her and to which she technically still belongs. No more evidence is needed than the dramatic images in montage that invade the television screens of Sydney, Australia, and are picked up by the world substituting for other forms

of evidence, forcing viewers beyond the threshold she represents.¹¹³ The images construct her at an instant, portraying the Doll as a terrorist and confining her to that role.

The ease with which the Doll is constructed is partly due to her exploitative profession and the existing fear of femininity in society. Kelly Oliver argues: “It is telling that the media continues to associate women and sex, going so far as to say that female sexuality itself is a weapon” (*Women as* 29). The corporate media adopts existing ideas and filters current events through available belief systems. In the Doll’s case, they are “turning her from a woman into cartoons, headlines, opinions, fears, fate. They were morphing her pixel by pixel, the Doll realized with terror, into what she wasn’t, the Black Widow” (261). The Doll’s realization of “terror” reverses the direction of violence; she is now the victim of the media’s version of terrorism as perpetrated by Richard Cody. He capitalizes on existing fears of women as weapons when he hears of a stage act where the Doll played the role of a female temptress called the “Black Widow” and reports it in the newscast.¹¹⁴ The act consists of the Doll appearing on stage “in a long black dress and hijab, then slowly strip...And as she did so, Ferdy, using a data projector, would cover her flesh with swirling Arabic lettering, which he claimed to the audience was ‘the Black Widow’s most sacred book’, the Koran” (41). It was all done to

¹¹³ Paul Virilio argues that television invades domestic space as “the emergence of a new kind of tele-vision, a television which no longer has the task of informing or entertaining the mass of viewers, but of exposing and invading individuals’ domestic space, like a new form of lightning” (*Information Bomb* 59). His idea capitalizes on the speed with which the images travel and the way they shape consciousness.

¹¹⁴ Kelly Oliver makes the connection between the figure of the Black Widow and the cultural fear of women as weapons.

the music and audio effects from “‘Flight of the Valkyries’ off an *Apocalypse Now* DVD” (40). The associations with Islam and the Koran facilitate her construction as a terrorist. The letters written on her body foreshadow the way the identity will be written on her by the corporate media, as represented by Richard Cody. The song and sounds from a war movie further the militant feeling of the performance. Cody exploits what the audience both on television and in the bar room already believes, namely that female sexuality is a weapon. The scene foregrounds the way the corporate media plays on existing stereotypes to give viewers what they want. Cody even takes the image one step further to link it to female suicide bombers. He tells his television audience that she strips as a “cover” and is known as “the Black Widow! Now, as we know, this is the same name given to militant Islamic women prominent in suicide attacks in Russia” (140). His words redouble the fear through associations with females who literally use their bodies as weapons and further connects with a fear of Islam associated with terrorism in the Anglo world in a way that amounts to a foreclosure by fear.

The images, the associations, and the fear that lead the public into believing the Doll is a terrorist foreclose her identity and also her ability to respond. She moves around the city without recourse or anyone to help her. The power of the corporate media to reach her friends and even reach into her past and drag up difficult memories lead the Doll to believe what they say about her. “Her own life felt to her only an ever more inaccurate reflection of what the media was saying about her. And maybe instead of fighting this, she began to think her real role was to find a way of agreeing with the television, the radio, the newspapers, not fighting and denying them ... One had to

conform, that was what mattered” (172). The corporate media begins to close her off to the point where they define her, even to herself. She is powerless in the face of a power that has an instantaneous and omnipresent reach, defining her through fear and misperception. Foreclosure, in this instance, amounts to conforming to the role everyone chooses for her. The easy role that perpetuates fear and drives an audience to tune into the television news program that pays no attention to real evidence and allows images to construct the associations needed to portray somebody as a terrorist. The audience forms a court of public opinion swayed by video montage and voice-overs from trusted anchormen who retain subjectivity for themselves by taking it from the Doll.¹¹⁵

The final realization of the corporate media’s power is in the fate of the Doll; she becomes a terrorist when she realizes there is no hope of escaping the way she has been defined and takes control the only way she feels she can. She prepares to take her vengeance on Richard Cody. Cody not only is the person who started the maelstrom, but also symbolizes a corporate media without ethics, concerned only with profit and advancement. The Doll shaves her head, the physical transformation indicating a shift in identity from woman in distress to woman as weapon of war. She steals a gun and finds Cody at the club where she worked.

As she aims to shoot Cody, she regains a little of her own self. “No one was going to pay the price the Doll, no politician or journalist was going to speak for her ...

¹¹⁵ Margaret Morse argues that “Full subjectivity in American television is reserved for representatives of television ... the spokespersons of corporate sponsors and advertisers, and, under special circumstances, the president” (38). It is the same in Australian society as well, for Flanagan. The anchorman retains voice by being able to respond to the images and create a story. Others are constructed by the story and, thus, do not retain subjectivity.

she was herself and not an invention, a prejudice, a label” (309). The irony is that she becomes the thing that the media made her out to be, a terrorist and a killer. However, she feels empowered by taking fate into her own hands as she shoots Cody. A police officer kills her in the act and both die in the place their story started. The foreclosure performed on her by the local media outlets leaves her without a life all because of a mistaken link between her and terrorism started by one reporter and picked up by the rest of the corporate media to create a story.

In a society consumed by capitalism and fear, the exception becomes the truth. The extreme initiates fear that travels at the speed with which information moves in the contemporary world, instantly. The exception then becomes the norm. Flanagan foregrounds the problem of such a phenomenon when he turns Richard Cody’s lie into the truth by turning the Doll into a terrorist. “The chorus of radio and television, the slow build of plasma image and newspaper and magazine photograph, the rising leafstorm of banners and newsflashes not only made any error impossible to rectify, they made errors the truth, the truth became of no consequence” (290). Power creates knowledge in the world of infotainment, where high-tech graphics can draw the viewer in and montages can link meanings to define through association. Yet, real lives hang in the balance instead of characters in a Hollywood production. The Doll understands this problem when she realizes it is just like a reality television show that has no basis in reality. Producers edit, cut, and follow the links they desire to make drama that people will watch and garner ratings for the network. The Doll “knew for most watching and listening she was a wonderful story – mysterious, sleazy and sinister – all in the form of

an instant celebrity...Perhaps she, a long-time *Survivor* fan, instinctively thought that the rules and logic of the show she now found herself in would be revealed if she too just watched carefully and patiently” (283). The problem with the thought is that she had already been written off, given no other option than becoming what they told her to be. She sees herself implicated in the process; she was a viewer no different than those that believed the hype about her, and she would have condemned her in the same way if she did not know better.

The power that creates knowledge finds itself in trouble when the profit-motive takes over and controls the scenes, the characters, and the subject matter, and openings are hard to find. This media has the ability to create a simulacra, seduce the viewer with images, and find an ideology that dominates society that everyone can buy into.¹¹⁶ The ideology of fear happens to be the prevailing discourse in the war on terrorism. Its all inclusive power strikes too easily by foreclosing anything even remotely associated or perceived to be linked with terrorism. Flanagan’s critique is blunt, bleak, and to the point, but it serves to implant the thought that he desires. The destitution of one woman opens up the ground to think about the ability of the media to sway public opinion, construct an image, and force an extreme identity on a person until society forces the individual to become what has been determined.

¹¹⁶ The simulacra I refer to can be defined in Baudrillard’s terms as “the generation by models of a real without origin or reality” (*Selected Writings* 169). The seduction here derives from Baudrillard also, as that which extracts meaning from discourse and detracts it from its truth. The seduction of the images draws the viewer away from truth and into the simulacra.

McEwan's Opening

In *Saturday*, Ian McEwan's protagonist, Henry Perowne, drives by a storefront window stacked with televisions of all types and sizes. "What's showing on every device is the Prime Minister giving a studio interview. The close-up of a face is steadily becoming a close-up of a mouth, until the lips fill half the screen. He has suggested in the past that if we knew as much as he did, we too would want to go to war" (142). The televised production focuses on the mouth of the Prime Minister to draw the gaze of the viewer to the point in question. Are these lips lying or telling the truth? However, many never ask such a question due to the power those lips embody. Instead of initiating a question through the camera's precise focus, the televised interview lends a mouthpiece to the Prime Minister, making him the sole point of reference and effectively giving him power to create knowledge in a media saturated world. Instead of knowledge creating power, as in the classic dictum, power now, quite literally, makes knowledge.¹¹⁷

Without the volume, it is obvious what the Prime Minister is speaking about. The text takes place at a time when the Iraq war debate was raging in London, and the topic is front and center on the news. The politician appears on most every media outlet taking the case for war to the people. The repetition of his face on multiple screens at once takes notice of the repetitive strategy, if enough unified voices step forward then people

¹¹⁷ It is Michel Foucault's point in "Power/Knowledge," and in the contemporary world, the shift is literal. Politicians and subsequently the media have the power to create knowledge by shaping the discourse that surrounds a topic.

will be convinced, and it redoubles the point, repeated statements become realities.¹¹⁸

Furthermore, the politician hints at the knowledge he has, peeking curiosity and lending credence to the idea that those in power are the only ones that have the knowledge to make these types of judgments. Power creates knowledge in this instance through a legible media strategy, and the aesthetic properties add to the perception of authority.

The above example moves along the z-axis when it shifts the focus from the entire face to the lips of the Prime Minister, taking the view and the viewer into the mouth of the politician, bridging the figurative gap between the world leader and any citizen on the street. The television production uses the z-axis to pull the viewer into the scene with camera movement.¹¹⁹ As opposed to the horizontal and vertical x and y-axis of a one dimensional graph, the z-axis adds dimensions and extends out of the screen over the shoulder of the viewer. By moving along the z-axis, the viewer goes from a position of distanced observer to being inside of the scene. The camera starts from the viewer's point of view and moves into the scene, pulling the gaze with it and putting it in the television screen. It literally puts an observer into the image by allowing participation in the scene. It invokes a feeling of sincerity by constructing the perspective of the politician speaking directly to a person.

The focus on the lips underscores how the corporate media closes down a narrative by capitalizing on political statements; the lips of the politician become the

¹¹⁸ It is the same strategy used by advertisers. A repeated message regarding a product will be implanted in the mind of viewers. Commercials run repeatedly in close intervals to force their message on viewers.

¹¹⁹ Margaret Morse describes how the z-axis acts as a "figure of induction" that draws the viewer into the screen (72).

single point of reference for the discussion of the war. The Prime Minister is pushing his view onto the public and not allowing dissenting voices by hinting at his privileged knowledge. It forecloses attempts at responding to his statements because no ordinary person is privy to the same knowledge his powerful position suggests. It effectively closes off the dialogue implied in the close-up images by changing from a seemingly two-sided conversation to a direct address. It exhibits the fallacy of television discourse, the illusion of being an interlocutor with the screen.¹²⁰ It highlights the problem that occurs when the media spectacle becomes the primary point of reference for an event.

In *Saturday*, McEwan appropriates the media spectacle to highlight the problem of reference it brings about. The empty nature of the spectacle and the profit motive of the corporate media leave the images of terrorism to be defined primarily by self-interest on the part of the program, network, or politician involved in the broadcast. Flanagan poses this problem as one that damages an individual, altering her life in irrevocable ways. McEwan confronts the spectacle in a different way by setting the text against the background of an antiwar protest in London.¹²¹ McEwan's protagonist must figuratively and literally pass through it, causing him problems that set up the terrorist incident that the text builds toward. Whether it be work, art, or the impending war that dominates the subtext of the novel, it always depends upon which reference points the novel's protagonist refers to when making decisions. When things do not make sense in the

¹²⁰ Margaret Morse explains how "discourse simulated on television is presented as if it were direct and permeable, when it is actually one-way and irreversible" (48). It gives the illusion of a conversation when in reality it speaks directly to a viewer.

¹²¹ On February 15, 2003, almost two million people protested in central London (Carpenter 151). It garnered a vast amount of media attention that the novel appropriates to confront the spectacle.

world, it is “[s]urely another example of a problem of reference” for McEwan’s narrator (18). It depends upon the reference points with which one constructs the world, and in a world where the media spectacle dominates the imagination, the media spectacle must be challenged. McEwan substitutes a different reference point for his protagonist in order to show how the state of exception forms a threshold through which one must pass in order to come to informed conclusions regarding terrorism and not jump to war. It amounts to seeing terrorism as an event and sets up an ethical dilemma that Perowne must face.

The same concept can be used to describe the way the media functions in *Saturday*, as something that misreads an event, recreating it to its own design. Critics miss the significance of the media spectacle in the novel in lieu of focusing on other reference points. Molly Clark Hillard highlights on the misreading of a poem by the characters in the text and the way it has profound significance. In her argument, “*Saturday* is a novel that turns upon reading and reading again, that apparently requires reading again to avoid misprision” (183). She discusses “misprision” in the sense that Harold Bloom defines the term, as a deliberate misreading that allows the reader to remake the text as they like. It shifts the point of reference from the text to the reader. Hillard describes this as setting the text free to do the desired work. It shifts the point of reference from the actual event, the reality of the situation, to the constructed spectacle that portrays a unified meaning set free of the actual.

The reader’s point of reference in the text is decidedly Henry Perowne, but critics lose sight of this fact while criticizing the text’s inability to represent London. The text follows Henry through the mundane tasks of a single Saturday as the narrator inhabits

his thoughts to allow an interior perspective. Elizabeth Kowaleski Wallace notes that the text is “designed to place us, quite convincingly, inside Henry’s head and offer us the perfect illusion of a singular and insistent interiority” (471). However, she argues that the perspective “forecloses the novel against unstated possibilities of broader and more comprehensive connection” (471).¹²² I do not disagree, but I fail to criticize the novel, as does Wallace, on these grounds either. McEwan offers a single vantage point to allow us to see how one man witnesses the media spectacle of terrorism and the political chaos linking the war on terrorism to the Iraq war. Protests against the Iraq war form the backdrop of the text to highlight the questions. That Perowne happens to be white and successful has more to do with the author’s own subject position than it does with trying to create an authentic portrayal of London.¹²³ However, critics describe the failure of the text to confront terrorism or create a story that is able to arouse a complacent society. John Banville, Christopher Hitchens, Dennis Lim, and Elaine Hadley all object.¹²⁴ They also persecute the text on its failure to present London in an engaging manner.¹²⁵

¹²² Wallace’s article focuses on the failure of the text to incorporate the cosmopolitan and multicultural aspects of London without which, she argues, the novel does not authentically depict contemporary London and remains a text that reinstitutes an antiquated notion of class in its isolation.

¹²³ Wallace admits this fact, that Perowne most likely represents McEwan’s own perspective on the media and events, yet contrasts the writer in other ways.

¹²⁴ The critics also focus on a misreading of a Matthew Arnold poem that appears at the end of the text. They miss the point that it is not

¹²⁵ The same critics disapprove of the intertextual elements of the text as well. The fact that the novel covers a single day in the life of its protagonist instantly draws critics to reference literary classics like Joyce’s *Ulysses* and Wolfe’s *Mrs. Dalloway* for comparison. Perowne’s daughter forces him to read literary classics for which he has no aptitude and struggles to finish. Furthermore, the culminating scene of the text in which a man breaks into Perowne’s home and terrorizes his family hinges on a recitation of Matthew Arnold’s “Dover Beach.” John Banville finds fault in the text’s dismissal of its

However, the criticisms fail to acknowledge the unreliable narrator or that the author's voice takes a back seat to portraying Perowne's perspective.

I focus on the area that other critics have neglected, the novel's meditation on TV, and one man's perspective on that single point of reference. Frances Ferguson notes that "The technological innovation of the modern world – our ability to learn about distant events and to communicate, both instantaneously and in recordings, with distant persons – has attracted the attention of virtually all the commentary I have read about *Saturday*" (44). Critics are concerned with the technological innovations that play a role in the text, but they are less interested in the content delivered by this technology, McEwan's confrontation with how the corporate media controls the discourse

literary forbearers saying, "Perowne's literally unbelievable ignorance of literature allows McEwan to engage in outbursts of philistinism" (22). Banville adds that "all the writers he mentions get it in the neck" (22). Banville seems to take offense to McEwan's seeming lack of respect for high literature in favor of an uncultured response to society. It is a reaction that loses sight of the fact that *Saturday* is a novel that proffers an idea of literature's role in opening a response to what may well be the most important issue of the day, terrorism. Zoe Heller understands the contradiction that Perowne embodies. For Heller,

The paradox, of course, is that even as Perowne denies the fundamental usefulness of fiction, his daylong preoccupations supply the matter for the novel we are reading. He is surely right: literature cannot give absolute answers, or furnish watertight explanations. What it can do, McEwan proposes, is capture the moral tangle of personal life and historical context that is our lived experience. (n.p.)

McEwan's text is the literary engagement, not the character's musings on the literary. Perowne has no use for literature, but McEwan obviously does, a fact lost on Banville. McEwan constructs a character that is the embodiment of the contemporary world, more concerned with work and personal activities than understanding the value of literature in society. In Perowne, McEwan offers a glimpse of a highly educated man, a neurosurgeon, who has no interaction with world events except to watch them on the 24-hour news channel. The role of literature for McEwan comes in the way it interrupts the routine of a man like Perowne, not in the judgments he passes on classic texts.

surrounding terrorism. The text confronts the media spectacle directly because of the way the images shaped perceptions of 9/11, even in London on that fateful day.

In an article written in *The Guardian*, McEwan acknowledges the dominant role the corporate media played in his own understanding of the attacks on the World Trade Center:

Only television could bring this. Our set in the corner is mostly unwatched. Now my son and I surfed – hungrily, ghoulishly – between CNN, CBC, and BBC24. As soon as an expert was called in to pronounce on the politics or the symbolism, we moved on. We only wanted to know what was happening. Numbed, and in a state of sickened wonderment, we wanted only information, new developments – not opinion, analysis, or noble sentiments; not yet. (“Beyond Belief” n.p.)

McEwan’s own need for information in light of the terrorist attacks led him to the television news and the coverage that crossed the Atlantic to his London home in an instant. He understands the unique property of the 24-hour news to bridge the distance and also define it through expert analysis. McEwan had to actively turn away from the analysis to find information, as if information were not tainted by the medium of television and its modes of narration.¹²⁶ McEwan’s actions foreground the central role the corporate media plays when trying to understand a terrorist event, especially of that magnitude. McEwan’s text attempts to shift away from the universal discourse of the

¹²⁶ The spectacle takes shape due to the physical properties of television. The medium contains within itself a reinterpretation of events simply by what it chooses to show, how it is shown, and the authority people give to the images. Marshal McLuhan’s famous maxim is appropriate here, “the medium is the message” (7).

corporate media that forecloses terrorism's meanings, and the novel attempts to open singular understanding based on individual experience that offers an engagement with the event itself.

Perowne's experiences are exactly that, per-own, unto himself as the allegorical name implies. He represents the way people see the world, through their own points of reference placed throughout a particular environment. In a media saturated world, a problem evolves when those reference points are constructed by a corporate media whose primary goal is building and retaining audience, rather than transmitting information.¹²⁷ Images infiltrate everyday life to the point where they become the common reference points everyone talks about. They become inescapable as Perowne realizes during a squash match, when he sees "a reflection of the silent TV behind him showing the same old footage" on the news (109). He asks, "Isn't it possible to enjoy an hour's recreation without this invasion, this infection from the public domain?" (109). The news is ubiquitous and inescapable, the same images are repetitive throughout his day. These images seep into the public domain as an ever present contagion, recurring and expanding, infecting consciousness with its foreclosed collective meaning, establishing unchangeable points of reference. As he plays a game with his squash partner, he realizes it is a game he plays with the media too, trying to escape its defining grasp.

¹²⁷ Much in the way theories of neoliberalism describe how open markets allow companies to construct the consumer rather than market to the existing population. It effectively unifies the population through a common desire, making it easier to sell a product to a larger quantity of people.

The media spectacle of terrorism has the ability to shift Perowne's points of reference through its ubiquitous representations. The news story Perowne sees while playing squash reports on a plane he witnessed flying over London in the pre-dawn hours of Saturday morning. He wakes and walks over to the window to find an eerily familiar image in the sky, a plane on fire. For Perowne, "the spectacle has the familiarity of a recurrent dream," having often thought about the possibilities of disaster in air travel since 9/11 (14). He automatically assumes the problem on the aircraft must be terrorism related because of the way 9/11 forms the point of reference for any air travel disaster.¹²⁸ The images from New York have had a lasting effect on the way he looks at flying. "It's already almost eighteen months since half the planet watched, and watched again, the unseen captives driven through the sky to the slaughter, at which time there gathered round the innocent silhouette of any jet plane a novel association. Everyone agrees, airliners look different in the sky these days, predatory or doomed" (15). The statement amounts to a confirmation of the power of the media spectacle to become the master signifier for all related occurrences. By becoming the point of reference, the spectacle defines what Perowne sees in the night sky for him, affecting an inability to witness other occurrences without the influence of the past. The spectacle has a constitutive effect as it shapes how he views the present circumstances.

McEwan's example demonstrates how a subjective event becomes knowledge through the collective viewing process of the news. The story does not enter into public consciousness until it is reported on the news, leaving it open for individual

¹²⁸ The television images of 9/11 have become a simulacrum for him, referring to themselves instead of the real event.

speculation.¹²⁹ Perowne has to check the 24-hour news broadcast for the breaking story of the plane to find out what happened. He leaves his bedroom where he first sees the plane and goes to the kitchen where he checks the “small TV they keep near the stove for moments like this, breaking stories” (29). It seems there is a need for a TV within reach just for the convenience of watching the news. It also foregrounds the contemporary need for information to be readily available, and Perowne needs to have the meaning promised by the news as well. The corporate media creates a desire for the information and the foreclosed interpretation the news provides; Perowne expects closure. The news may well be ubiquitous, but Perowne is complicit in its omnipresence by keeping the television on hand and turning to the news when he feels the need for information. It has become a crutch relied upon to put the story into context.¹³⁰ To his disappointment, the story has not reached the networks yet, meaning it has not become a part of public consciousness because it “has yet to enter the planetary matrix. It remains an unreliable subjective event” (29). The news brings something into the “matrix” by connecting the incident to people and making sense of it in a public forum. Until then, the occurrence is not dependable to him because it is open to singular understanding. Perowne does not even trust his own senses to tell him what happened; he needs an authority to investigate and define the situation for him, and the journalist comes across

¹²⁹ It is as if the news allows the event to enter into reality in the way Michael Schudson explains how “journalists not only report reality but create it” (2). The news brings an event to the awareness of the public in puts it into a communal consciousness that makes it real to the viewer. He does not argue that the journalist actually creates the story by reporting it, but the journalist makes the story real for the viewer.

¹³⁰ Sociologist Michael Schudson describes how part of the journalists effort is to put stories into common moral language that relates the news to the viewer (181).

as an expert to close out any doubts about what occurred.¹³¹ It is not until a later broadcast that the story is reported and “made real at last” with images of “the plane, askew on the runway, apparently in-tact, surrounded by firefighters still spraying foam, soldiers, police” (35). With these images comes the realization that Perowne had the situation wrong. The plane simply made an emergency landing. It was not terrorism after all, but it redoubles his faith in the news media to tell him the truth of the matter.

The spectacle of the broadcast draws the audience into the screen by creating a false sense of authority at its outset. The news hour begins with an opening sequence of “pulsing synthetic music, spiraling, radiating, computer graphics, combined in a *son et lumiere* of Wagnerian scale to suggest urgency, technology, global coverage” (29). The effects attempt to build a sense of anticipation and desire to know what happens next. The urgency suggests that viewers cannot miss what is to come. The use of high tech graphics conveys a sense of technical mastery needed to demonstrate authority over the subject matter in our tech heavy world. Technological aptitude also brings an association with other hi-tech tools needed in the information business to reach a global audience and be informed on any number of issues instantly. It all builds the authority of the newscast and brings the audience into its reach like customers being drawn to a product. It adds to the viewer’s submission to the authority of the journalists and how the population hangs on the words of the corporate media.

¹³¹ Part of the narrative structure of the news, explains Schudson, “implicitly authorize[s] the journalist as expert” (185). Therefore, a news report can have the effect of expert testimony and determine how things occurred in its analysis as much as report what happened.

The rush to the 24-hour newscast after 9/11 is simply part of how the media works to create a state of emergency. The exceptional event is allowed to define everyday experience. 9/11 becomes a justification for uncommon security measures to be put in place on a permanent basis, becoming the norm. The corporate media draws people in by perpetuating the fear the state of exception needs to suspend the normal rules and laws. McEwan portrays it as part of growing-up in a world fixated by the threat of global terrorism. For Perowne's son, 9/11 amounted to "His initiation, in front of the TV" (32). The terrorist attacks brought him into world events and ignited a desire to constantly know what was happening. He is fixated on newspapers, television, and anything that will bring him word of the emergencies going on around the world; the emergency is the norm, as Agamben has indicated. It occupies the son's mind when something occurs, but "As long as there's nothing new, his mind is free. International terror, security cordons, preparations for war – these represent the steady state, the weather. Emerging into adult consciousness, this is the world he finds" (32). The comparison between terror and the weather refers to the increasing banality of terrorism when it occupies the news every day. To say he comes into adulthood into a world of terror makes fear manifest and pays homage to the effectiveness of the spectacle of terrorism. The spectacle portrays the world in a constant state of emergency through which, as Giorgio Agamben describes, new laws and norms are put in place in the guise of necessity.¹³² McEwan portrays this as normal as the weather, a situation in which

¹³² Agamben argues, "The voluntary creation of a permanent state of emergency (though perhaps not declared in the technical sense) has become one of the essential practices of

terror, security, and war are at the forefront of the average adult mind. These issues deter engagement and, through their perceived normalcy, become part of daily life that accepts their presence. However, McEwan confronts the blind acquiescence to policies instituted in the exception by setting the text against the backdrop of an anti-war demonstration.

The text sets up a comparison between the state of emergency the corporate media creates and the communal solidarity of a demonstration against the war. The media spectacle drives anxiety and instills a compulsion to watch, a need to know, into the population. There is a “pull, like gravity, of the approaching TV news. It’s a condition of the times, this compulsion to hear how it stands with the world, and be joined to the generality, to a community of anxiety” (180). The corporate media instills a desire in the viewer that drives the need to see and know. A community forged in anxiety and constantly inculcated with “monstrous and spectacular scenes” that waits for the next emergency or the next catastrophe to entertain them with a reality (180). The spectacle reinstitutes desire through the repetition and anticipation for what is next. McEwan envisions the damaging effects of a populous continuing blindly through a routine of fear and awe driven by the audience’s “collective mind, a sickening for self-punishment and a blasphemous curiosity” (180). It invokes “a narrowing of mental freedom” that forecloses the population and inhibits dissenting voices through the solidarity it instills (184). McEwan also portrays a world driven by “worst-case guesses that become facts through repetition, the sweet rapture of pessimism” (191). The writer’s acute awareness of the way the corporate media functions provides a bleak outlook on contemporary states, including so-called democratic ones” (*State of 2*). The emergency rules become the norm.

the prospects for a society continually bombarded by more and more information. It forecloses thought and allows others to fill in conclusions. The community forged out of the media is compared to a community founded on dissent, as the text juxtaposes the solidarity of the media spectacle to a protest march against the war in Iraq in central London. The protest seems to stand in the face of the political rhetoric on which the corporate media capitalizes, but it simply forms a backdrop to everyday life instead of change the way Perowne envisions the war on terror. The march by millions of people garners top coverage on the newscast, but it is made into another spectacle to be seen and not engaged. The aerial views of millions of people uniting against the war create stunning footage, but it does not create a conversation. The protest simply becomes an inconvenience for Perowne as he drives through the streets of London where roads are closed and his ordinary route is blocked. He simply finds a way through the roadblocks and thumbs his nose at the protest as he continues to feel that the matters are out of his control. Perowne argues that “the war’s going to happen, with or without the UN, whatever any government says or any mass demonstrations” (194). He feels out of control without a critical voice, and needless to say, he does not care to engage. The media spectacle has created a society where information overload leads to, ironically, a lack of engagement instead of more.

Perowne’s bleak outlook is interrupted by a personal event in which he confronts the extreme nature of terrorism in the form of the exception. It forces him to change his outlook and creates an opening in the media foreclosure. Everything Perowne does throughout the text leads up to the penultimate scene where his family is gathering for a

dinner at home. All of the tensions of the day are set aside for Perowne, and he is relieved because “it’s statistically improbable that terrorists will murder his family tonight” (208). Even though he is relieved, the threat of terrorism remains; he cannot escape the dominant perception of the time. He does not, however, believe that events can permeate his domestic life, even though earlier that day he had a run-in with a thug on the street. An altercation ensued after an incident in the car where a man, Baxter, attempted to bully Perowne into paying for auto damage that was not Perowne’s fault. The stark reality of the incident stayed with Perowne all day in the form of a bruise on his chest caused by a blow he received from Baxter. The bruise accentuates the difference between incidents on the news and ones that occur directly to Perowne. The corporate media portrays a society that coincides with the emergency state, but Baxter forces a personal confrontation that is unmediated and so extreme that it pushed Perowne through a threshold that leads him to action instead of blind acquiescence. When Baxter appears at Perowne’s home, it interrupts the family dinner with the reality of terrorism.

The experience of terror in the home contrasts to the media spectacle of terrorism so that the event can be envisioned in a singular manner. Baxter’s presence recalls that terrorist events happen to people in different ways. In this case, Baxter holds the family hostage, tells Perowne’s daughter to strip, and forces her to read a poem. The unique circumstances contrast to any media portrayal. “Baxter is a special case” because he does not fit the stereotype of a terrorist, with a brain condition Perowne noticed earlier and a desire to humiliate the family rather than create a media circus; he is a terrorist through his actions but not through the media influenced definition (217). Baxter is the

extreme, both a terrorist and not a terrorist.¹³³ However, it is terrorism all the same as Baxter puts the family in a “terrified state” (228). The home in which the Perowne family resides becomes the temporary state of exception in which emergency rules apply to resolve the situation. The unique circumstances allow for a comparison between the way terrorism is portrayed by the corporate media and the reality of what happens to one family. It is not so much the horror of a high jacking or the magnitude of an explosion that engulfs them. It is the simple fear that takes over when a loved one is threatened that defines terror.

Art interrupts the scene and helps Perowne figure a way out of the incident. When Baxter asks for a poem to be read, the effects are discernibly felt. Perowne’s daughter, Daisy, recites Matthew Arnold’s “Dover Beach” instead of read something she has written, and it changes Baxter’s demeanor. “Could it happen, is it within the bounds of the real, that a mere poem ... could precipitate a mood swing?” (229). The reiteration of the “real” contrasts with the spectacle of terrorism because within the real incident art plays a role, unlike the conceptions of terrorism formed through the lens of the corporate media. The incident shows the singular possibilities that evolve out of any occurrence and, yes, art interrupts the scene invoking “the transformation of his [Baxter’s] role, from lord of terror to amazed admirer” (232). It also allows Perowne to devise a plan that involves Baxter’s degenerative brain condition. The emergency situation calls for a suspension of any normal behavior in order to defend his family, an emergency state. He

¹³³ He is the exception in his position at the extreme of the law, being outside of legal boundaries but being defined by those same boundaries. He represents the position of why the state of exception is invoked, but in this case, on a personal level.

draws Baxter upstairs on the basis of showing him the current research regarding his condition, and while on the stairs, Perowne and his son force Baxter down, hitting his head in the fall and knocking him unconscious. The terrorist event ends without spectacular issues or media attention. Perowne's point of reference for what a terrorist event means shifts from the version offered by 24-hour newscasts to the singular event that happened to his family and challenged his outlook. McEwan contrasts the state of exception that overtook the house to the emergency state in which the corporate media dominates the perception of terrorism.

The decision that takes place at the end of the text demonstrates the way a terrorist event, when experienced in a singular manner allows for critical engagement. When Perowne is called to the hospital to perform an operation on Baxter, he must decide what to do. It is the moral dilemma that plays out in the corporate media regarding terrorism, how to deal with the perpetrators. Perowne has Baxter's life in his hands as he performs brain surgery on the man who terrorized his family. But Perowne never flinches as he performs exactly as he would on any other patient. The question of vengeance that seemed to be at the forefront of the scene never materializes. The terrorist event, even though it occurred to his own family, did not inspire revenge when confronted by the humanity of the perpetrator. When Perowne enters the operating room, it is with the purpose of a surgeon and nothing more. His reference point in that theater is his job, his training, and his patient, no matter who it might be.

The media spectacle of terrorism forms an interesting dynamic with both the singular event that occurred to Perowne's family and with the operating room where

Perowne works. The event at the Perowne house offers a singular view of terrorism as it occurs to a specific group of people outside of media representations. It represents terrorism as an event in the way Perowne decides in an unmediated fashion how to deal with the circumstance and with the perpetrator. Nothing mediates the event, and it challenges Perowne's personal view of terrorism and what should be done to the perpetrators. It contrasts with the foreclosed version offered by the corporate media that makes one think of terrorism as spectacular and defying understanding. However, when the event is broken down and seen as something that occurs to specific individuals and is dealt with in diverse ways, its meaning comes across as decidedly different from the corporate media's. The operating room constitutes a space similar to the one in which the corporate media operates. It has its own points of reference in the sterile environment that block out any other thought from breaking through the walls. It is a place where no decision need be made because the course is laid out through the surgeon's oath and training that forecloses thought in lieu of beneficent purpose. The corporate media, on the other hand, forecloses thought for a selfish purpose that drives ratings and denies valid options for dealing with terrorism. The corporate media forms points of reference for terrorism that prohibit engagement in favor of the anxiety that keeps people watching.

Fundamental Changes for Hamid

Mohsin Hamid's protagonist, Changez, a Pakistani man living and working in New York City, shifts course when his identity is foreclosed by the corporate media that produced hatred and fear toward Muslims in the aftermath of 9/11.¹³⁴ It shifts Changez's faith in the western world and alters his outlook to the point where he cannot follow his previous course in America and returns to Pakistan to try to make a difference. In a conversation with an unnamed American man, Changez explains how "the rhetoric emerging from your country at that moment in history – not just from the government, but from the media and supposedly critical journalists as well – provided a ready and constant fuel for my anger" (167). He points directly to the media spectacle as tied together by the voices in the government and journalism for the cause of the anger that drove him out of the U.S. The anger on both sides constructed a divisive wall between the western world and all others perceived as complicit in terrorism. Changez suggests to his American interlocutor: "As a society, you were unwilling to reflect upon the shared pain that united you with those who attacked you. You retreated into myths of your own difference, assumptions of your own superiority" (168). The rhetoric of the corporate

¹³⁴ Reviewers focus on the post-9/11 relationship between east and west that the book presents. For Jim Ottewill, "The novel succeeds in wrapping an exploration of the straining relationship between east and west in a gripping yarn" (n.p.). James Lasdun describes how "the precise, rather classical orchestration of symmetries and reciprocities is both a strength and a weakness in the book. It fosters the kind of concentratedly astute cultural observation at which Hamid excels" (n.p.). Both reviewers realize how the text hinges on the association between east and west. The critical questions Hamid focuses upon involve the movement between the two cultures and the way globalization connects the two in diverse ways.

media formed a divide and prohibited healing when it relied on shared myths to form meaning that confined the discourse and inhibited responses. It put the events of 9/11 into an immediate context, a pre-existing script of American exceptionalism, instead of seeing terrorism as an event that needed to be understood over time and from diverse angles. It forced the young Changez, who loved America and all that the country represented, to let go of his sense of self and follow another path.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist sets out to challenge the media foreclosure by examining the shift that takes place within one man. He goes from capitalist, working in a major Wall Street firm, to perceived fundamentalist due to the post-9/11 environment that alters everything for him. The idea of perception is key to his perceived fundamentalism and the way the text challenges foreclosure, because it is a western gaze that defines him as a fundamentalist, luring the reader into an assumption that will be questioned by the end of the text.¹³⁵ The gaze sets Changez up to be the extreme against which the state of exception is formulated. He resists this definition by explaining his story in a monologue to an American audience that he hopes will realize how its gaze forecloses his identity. The text is structured as a one-sided conversation in which a Pakistani and an American sit down at a café in a historic Lahore neighborhood. I argue that Changez tells his story to the American as a way of challenging the perceptions constructed by the media spectacle and subvert the western gaze, which the American represents. The conversation is one-sided in order to mirror the one-sided conversation

¹³⁵ The western gaze is discussed more below. I use it to argue that Hamid uses dominant perceptions to force a misreading of the protagonist of the text that questions the media spectacle the affects the foreclosure.

American corporate media has about Islam, fundamentalism, and Jihad. Changez's story attempts to make connections between past and present, east and west that bridge the gap between the two men. It connects the two worlds by using allegorical figures and intertextual references that add to the dialogue between east and west that literally takes place in the conversation between an American and Pakistani that frames the text. I believe the monologue creates an opening in the foreclosed position of the Muslim, in the eyes of the west, by leading the reader into a trap. The trap interrupts the western gaze in forces a reconsideration of the idea of who a terrorist is in a way that challenges contemporary figurations of power.¹³⁶

The Reluctant Fundamentalist travels across boundaries through its intertextuality. The text is indebted greatly to Albert Camus' *The Fall* as it appropriates the structure of the French writer's novel. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* mirrors *The Fall*'s dialogue between the narrator and a silent listener. It amounts to a monologue spoken directly to the reader of the text, as the reader takes the form of the person being spoken to. In an interview with Jai Arjun Singh, Hamid explains how he was influenced by modernist fiction that "deliberately makes the relationship between the reader and reading central to the text" (n.p.). Both texts set up a dynamic in which the narrator

¹³⁶ The text challenges power instead of investigating the lasting effects of British Imperialism. Paul Jay refers to Hamid's first novel, *Moth Smoke*, as a "post post colonial" text because of the way it avoids the legacy of colonialism in favor of "dramatizing how economic globalization has transformed Lahore and the characters populating the novel" (52). Hamid's latest novel takes up the same issue while exploring other networks of power that circulate with globalization, namely the media spectacle of terrorism. It is a decidedly contemporary viewpoint that examines how both money and spectacle circulate around the globe. Both cross borders at will and challenge societies from a great distance, both leaving behind and taking away perceptions of the other.

speaks directly to the reader figuratively bridging the gap between writer and reader and, in Hamid's case, crossing the boundary between east and west to an anticipated western audience. The inspirations taken from Camus do not stop there as the Camus' narrator, Jean-Baptiste Clamence, appears as a character, not literally the same person but the recreation of the character, Juan-Bautista. Furthermore, the monologue of *The Fall* circles around one central event that occurred in Jean-Baptiste's life, forcing him to reconsider all of his experiences and see himself in a new light.¹³⁷ The same kind of event interrupts Changez's life, and Juan-Bautista acts as the messenger that forces him to see the event with clarity and accept the changes it brought to him. The intertextual elements bridge the east/west divide by bringing a Pakistani writer in direct dialogue with a canonical western writer.¹³⁸

Furthermore, the text attempts to cross the east/west divide by observing how each side maintains certain ideas of the other, and the novel challenges the efficacy of those ideas by making comparisons between the most intrusive elements of each society, the respective fundamentalists, that unfortunately become the master-signifier for each society.¹³⁹ The fundamentalists act as the extreme to which the emergency state responds by enacting the state of exception. The structure of the text furthers the goal of

¹³⁷ Lois Vines describes Jean-Baptiste as having "experienced a traumatic event that triggered self-doubt" (143). The event forces him to reconsider his actions and position in life to the point where he becomes penitent, a clear shift from how he was before.

¹³⁸ This idea is complicated by the reference to Camus who was born and raised in Algeria, a primarily Muslim country, though he was a secular Frenchman.

¹³⁹ The term master-signifier is used here as Žižek uses the term, as an ideological reference point that has a "constitutive role" as it stands in for the identity of which it refers (*Ticklish Subject* 114). It fills in for real identities by constructing an ideology that prevents any other identity to come forward.

bridging the gap between the two worlds by resisting the extreme identity that amounts to a foreclosed position. Hamid comments on this idea in an interview for the book's website, where he states, "The form of the novel, with the narrator and the audience both acting as characters, allowed me to mirror the mutual suspicion with which America and Pakistan (or the Muslim world) view one another" (http://www.harcourtbooks.com/Reluctant_Fundamentalist/interview.asp). The narrator tells his story directly to the reader through the guise of an American man with whom the reader, at least an American reader, can empathize. The foreign terrain, the atmosphere of the Lahore café, and the "engaging story," according to critics, bring the reader into the narrative as part conversant and mainly a listener.¹⁴⁰ Hamid puts a character in the text, sitting in Lahore, embodying the western position that represents the reader.

Mohsin Hamid's question about fundamentalism forms out of both the religious and capitalist versions of the term. The title of the text embodies a paradox the book attempts to uncover, how can one be a reluctant fundamentalist? The question engages perspectives that foreclose the identities of fundamentalists or that miss the way fundamentalism is a multifaceted term. Karen Olsson argues that "Hamid would have us understand the novel's title ironically. We are prodded to question whether every critic of America in a Muslim country is a fundamentalist, of whether the term more accurately describes the capitalists of the American upper class" (n.p.). Olsson refers to the way contemporary capitalism as defined by neoliberalism has become market

¹⁴⁰ Jim Ottewill and James Lasdun each describe the novel as an engaging story. I take this as evidence of the way the text draws the reader in to engage the mechanisms of foreclosure that exist, namely the media spectacle.

fundamentalism, an overarching faith in open markets and free trade.¹⁴¹ In this view, the market is its own law and regulator as its basic function regulates capitalism. Religion historian Karen Armstrong defines fundamentalism as “a law unto itself” and fundamentalists as those who “wanted to go back to basics and reemphasize the ‘fundamentals’” of a tradition, in most cases a religious tradition (xii). While neoliberalism does not encompass the religious facet linked to contemporary fundamentalisms, it does embody the self regulation and cross-cultural contact that drives fundamentalist movements. Armstrong observes how the contact creates a crisis within the movement that stems from the perceived threat from the outside, igniting a fervor that inspires the fundamentalism to come to the fore. Changez is transformed from being someone caught up in market fundamentals to a man constructed by the corporate media as a religious fundamentalist. The shift creates inner turmoil in Changez and ignites a fervor for addressing the spectacle that forecloses his identity.

Hamid understands the media spectacle as a version of the gaze, the manifestation of visual power that has been a staple of film and feminist criticism for over three decades. Its use is largely attributed to Laura Mulvey’s 1975 article “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” where she explores the roots of the gaze in Lacanian and Freudian psychoanalysis and argues that it manifests itself in 20th century film. The gaze derives from “scopophilia,” which Mulvey defines as “taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze” (2184). It appears in film as a

¹⁴¹ Neoliberalism is often referred to as a fundamental belief in the markets. David Harvey argues, “The market is presumed to work as an appropriate guide – an ethic – for all human action” (165). In this way, the market is a fundamental guide to be relied on literally to dictate the direction of culture.

masculine gaze through which men objectify women, taking pleasure in constructing the female as a sexual object. The gaze, thus, enacts a powerful construction as it creates the other, in this case the woman, according to the desire of the viewer. It manifests itself in the media through the production of images that associate a particular identity with a definition that must be confronted by anyone connected to the image.¹⁴² Much like a spectacle, it overtakes the sense of experienced identity of those being gazed upon and fills it in with a particular perspective. In an era when the media spectacle dominates the perceptions of certain groups of people, images link with the gaze to dictate how those groups are seen. Clifford Manlove describes how the gaze functions when “Pleasure and repetition work together, making the visual drive a dynamic, transgressive power” (84). Through repetition, just like the media spectacle, the gaze is codified, forcing a particular identity on a group of people that forecloses their subjectivity and denies voice. The pleasurable aspect derives from fulfilling the media spectacle’s controlling impulse by enacting a particular identity. In the case of the masculine gaze, “Visual pleasure is thus associated with the male gaze’s narcissistic or sadistic operations,” argues Jessica Brent (81). It is related to the ego, a controlling mechanism that enacts a certain power over the feminine. In a broader sense, the gaze can be seen to assert the same power on more than just the feminine.

¹⁴² In terms of subject formation, Marcia Ian calls this a “screen,” “the array of cultural images that confronts us at every turn and in relation to which the subject must continually establish herself *as* a subject, perpetually waving and unweaving her subjective sense of identity and difference” (79). The screen forms a reference point to be held up as a standard to which the subject aspires.

The western gaze acts as a similar type of controlling mechanism but from a cultural perspective. It places the west in a position of taking an active role in defining, effectively foreclosing, the east through the constituted power of the viewer. In “Subverting the Western Gaze: mapping alternative worlds,” Barbara Bender describes how “The ‘Western Gaze’ succinctly expresses a particular, historically constituted, way of perceiving and experiencing the world. It is a gaze that skims the surface; surveys the land from an ego-centered viewpoint” (31). It asserts power on the other by defining based on face value instead of delving deeper into understanding another’s humanity. For Bender, “the Western Gaze is about control” (31). Enacting the gaze from the perspective of the west, puts the east in a subordinate role. It cuts off voice and allows the dominant discourse to fill in for the other identity. In contemporary times, the media spectacle fills in the dominant discourse, and the western gaze constructs Muslim men as terrorists. Moshin Hamid directly confronts the western gaze that paints Muslim men as terrorists in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.

Hamid’s language draws attention to the position of the gaze in the text. He draws our attention to the gaze throughout the text in innocuous situations, referring to the “intensity of your gaze” (16); “you move your gaze from one point to the next” (31); “Let us cast our gaze over a menu” (76); or, “I did not permit my gaze to linger” (158). The term draws attention to the real purpose of the gaze in the text, to show the fallacy of the western viewpoint and how it asserts an active control over the perception of Pakistan in a manner that amounts to foreclosure by constituting its object and disallowing alternative perspectives. Changez references the cultural specificity of the

gaze: “There are adjustments one must make if one comes here from America; a different way of *observing* is required. I recall the Americanness of my own gaze when I returned to Lahore” (124). He acknowledges how living in the U.S. shifted his own idea of Pakistan and altered how he viewed his home. The difference in the way of “*observing*” he suggests is actually a return to observing instead of gazing, to allow for a reality of Pakistan to take shape for the onlooker instead of imposing preexisting ideas on the scene. The difference opens the foreclosure of the gaze to new possibilities. Instead of active control exerted on the locale, the dynamic shape emerges at the forefront. Unfortunately, the western perspective is dominated by not only media portrayals but ideas of modernity as well.

Hamid sets up an economic and technological comparison to show how the western gaze views Pakistan and asserts its power. The relationship is based on modernity, the technological advancement of one civilization over the other without respect for the historical foundation of either culture. The comparisons make Changez “resentful” as he wonders how “Four thousand years ago, we, the people of the Indus River basin, had cities that were laid out on grids and boasted underground sewers, while the ancestors of those who would invade and colonize America were illiterate barbarians. Now our cities were largely unplanned, unsanitary affairs, and America had universities with individual endowments greater than our national budget for education” (34). The disparity, for Changez, plays into the way the west looks down upon Pakistan. “The achievements of the most technologically advanced civilization our species had ever known,” the U.S. according to Changez, allows it to exert its gaze on countries like

Pakistan. The power and influence over economic affairs also supports a western bias that gives the gaze its efficacy. Furthermore, Americans have a disdainful attitude toward the economic realities of Pakistan. When Erica, the American woman Changez falls in love with, has him to dinner with her family, Erica's father asks about the economy of Pakistan. He does so in a disdainful tone that assumes that corruption and fundamentalism have run the economy down. Changez describes it as a "typically *American* undercurrent of condescension" (55). The American businessman looks down upon the economy of Pakistan demonstrating the way the western outlook can cast an arrogant eye on another society. The economic and technological superiority of the west enable its power over other parts of the world and enables the western gaze.

Changez understands the perspective of the U.S. because he occupied the ranks of American business. At one point, he realizes that his ethnicity is being covered over by his role as a businessman. He explains that "I suspected my Pakistaniness was invisible, cloaked by my suit, by my expense account" (71). People see money and power of position before ethnicity in the contemporary world where multinational corporations exert extreme power. Changez graduated from business school at Princeton and took a job with a prestigious American firm, Underwood Sampson, upon graduation. The name for the firm symbolizes the nation with its initials, U.S. It is also a firm whose primary business is valuing other companies, essentially judging their perceived future earnings to form an estimate of their net value at a given time. The values of the firm can be connected to the perceived values of U.S. businesses. Changez describes how at Underwood Sampson "Maximum return was the maxim to which we returned, time and

again. We learned to prioritize – to determine the axis on which advancement would be most beneficial – and then to apply ourselves single-mindedly to the achievement of that objective” (37). The dogged pursuit of a particular goal excludes an ethic of responsibility. The company is driven by a profit motive, maximizing return on investment the same way the corporate media pushes for greater ratings in a competitive environment.

The pursuit of money in the capitalist environment made Changez into a different type of fundamentalist. As mentioned earlier, neoliberalism is often referred to as market fundamentalism where the basic belief that free and open markets will determine the best outcome. Changez repetitively describes his employers as teaching him to “*Focus on the fundamentals*. This was Underwood Sampson’s guiding principle” (98). The reverberation of this comment, “focus on the fundamentals,” can only mean that Hamid attempts to describe the environment of U.S. multinational firms as fundamentalist. The unquestioning faith in the market that drives the business plan of multinational firms is compared to the way terrorists experience the world through religious fundamentals. They each want to remake the world through their own perspective, a fundamentalist’s gaze.

Changez sees his role in the corporate world as “a modern-day janissary, a servant of the American empire at a time when it was invading a country” (152). A janissary, as described in the text, was a Christian child captured by the Ottomans and trained to fight for the Muslim army. They were incredible soldiers who fought to bring down their own civilization without even realizing it because they were trained to simply

be loyal to their cause. Changez sees himself as doing the same thing to the Muslim world by working for the American empire, the U.S. in the form of Underwood Sampson. The capitalist type of fundamentalism leads to an empire in the postmodern world by forcing the economic structures practiced and dominated by existing multinational corporations onto countries not ready to compete in the global market.¹⁴³ It changes the traditional culture of a place like Pakistan by bringing commodities from abroad and marketing them by creating new desires for the products that shift local preferences and, in effect, change the culture.

Changez begins to see the impact of his actions when he realizes that the commodification of aesthetics means the loss of unprofitable art. He is sent to Chile to value a publishing company that produces literary texts, among others. The literary arm of the company fails to turn a profit and is subsidized by the other types of books the company publishes. Changez must discern the value of the company without the literary arm included and doing so exposes him to a new or oppositional model for value, against market fundamentals. The realization brings up a question all literary writers are concerned with, how do we determine the value of art? Hamid creates a dichotomy in this situation between literature and commodity and comments on the business of books in general. The fact that the assignment changes Changez is a testament to the idea that

¹⁴³ In *Empire*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri explore the power of fundamentalism in many forms to lead to empire. They both represent an end in themselves, the end of history in favor of the stasis of their fundamental goals (xiv). They argue that “like postmodernist and postcolonialist theories, fundamentalisms too are a symptom of the passage to Empire” (147). It occurs in the way fundamentalisms reject modernity and occur as the polar opposite to most things that represent the postmodern world, i.e. hybridity, movement, etc., thus making it a symptom of the contemporary world.

one cannot value literature in economic terms. However, in this case, Changez must do just that because his role is purely financial. He must estimate the overall effect on the company of selling off or closing down the literary department, a proposal not well received by the man who runs the company, Juan-Bautista. As mentioned earlier, he is the namesake of Camus' protagonist in *The Fall*. He asks the crucial questions of Changez that make him see the dilemma he poses. And like Camus' character who emerges from complete self centeredness to an understanding of his own responsibility, Changez comes to see his complicity in the capitalist empire as self-serving. Bautista asks him, "Does it trouble you ... to make your living disrupting the lives of others?" (151). Changez replies by saying, "We just value... We do not decide whether to buy or to sell, or indeed what happens to a company after we have valued it" (151). But, the question stays with him to interrupt his microcosm of the world and force him to see his own role in the loss of people's livelihood when the portion of the business is sold off. His "blindness was coming off," and he admits he was "rendered immobile by the sudden broadening of my arc of vision" (145). He begins to explore the political situation of his homeland and pay attention to how similar the city around him, Valparaiso, Chile, is to his hometown of Lahore. He also stalls his valuation. His inability to put a price on publishing literature makes a statement in itself. The profit motive cannot adequately account for art's role in society. The realization forms a catalyst for the change that occurs in him, forcing him to make the connections between himself, capitalism, the U.S., his homeland, etc. The connections form new meanings that disrupt his prior

understanding of the world and force a new outlook upon him. However, one other event acts as a catalyst for the change within him as well.

The media spectacle of 9/11 reaches across borders to touch Changez in a definitive way. He was in the Philippines on September 11, working on an assignment for Underwood Sampson. He describes the experience as follows, showing how easily the images traveled around the world:

I turned on the television and saw what at first I took to be a film. But as I continued to watch, I realized that it was not fiction but news. I stared as one – and then the other – of the twin towers of New York’s World Trade Center collapsed. And then I *smiled*. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased. (72).

He attributes a sense of unreality to the images, a spectacle that belongs in film not the news, as do many others that experienced the shock of the event. However, he describes his reaction in detail; his remarkable pleasure at seeing the towers fall, but he does “so with a profound sense of perplexity” (73). It was not out of a lack of respect for the victims of the tragedy or a desire to see people die that Changez felt pleasure, “death on television moves me most when it is fictitious and happens to characters with whom I have built up relationships over multiple episodes,” he explains (74). The event appearing on TV did not allow him to empathize with the victims because they were not even characters in a drama to whom he was attached. The sentiment makes a point about the impersonal viewpoint of the corporate media and how it lost the victims’ tragedy in the spectacle of the images. Changez goes on to say how it was the “*symbolism* of it all,

the fact that someone had so visibly brought America to her knees” (73). He took pleasure in the giant being knocked off the hill, if only symbolically, but his comments are provocative. Speaking directly to an American and figuratively to the audience positioned as the listener, he intends to bring out a reaction of disgust and possibly hatred for him. He justifies his reaction by asking, “Do you feel no joy at the video clips – so prevalent these days – of American munitions laying waste the structures of your enemies?” (73). The question goes directly to the corporate media’s role in the projection of American power around the world. Its ability to show how devastating U.S. might can be if provoked amounts to a spectacle of its own, one that closes off possible forms of resistance or disagreement with U.S. policy through the constant threat of military power. Changez took pleasure in seeing a spectacle that competed with the others that circulated around the globe. When confronted with the reality of friends and the loved ones of colleagues dying in the attack, his reaction changes to one of grief. He sees the difference in the symbolic power of the media spectacle and the individual humanity of those who lost their lives.

The aftermath of 9/11 reshapes the American perception of Muslims by linking Muslims to terrorists in what amounts to an association with the extreme against which the state of exception is invoked. Changez feels alone amongst his colleagues and in a city he had come to know as his home. He first realizes the shift in perception when he boards the plane to return to New York from Manila. Even in the Philippines, he explains how he “elicited looks of concern” from the passengers after being “the last person to board” (74). He describes the feeling of being on that flight, “I flew to New

York uncomfortable in my own face: I was aware of being under suspicion; I felt guilty” (74). The looks single him out, showing how the gaze of the other passengers makes him feel as if he is a criminal. When he arrives in New York, he is singled out for secondary inspections that take much longer than those of his business associates and force him to ride home alone. Figuratively, his solo cab ride demonstrates his isolation from the environment he came to love. His business suit does not connect him to the others at Underwood Sampson any longer. He feels his Muslim identity more vividly, and it begins to manifest in a rage within him that will compel him to do act. The patriotic rhetoric that occupied the corporate media and the American flags that “invaded New York after the attacks” make him realize that New York City had returned to being an American city, something much different from the cosmopolitan metropolis it was before 9/11 (79). This event coupled with his conversation with Bautista that makes him see his complicity in a capitalism that is invading his own country forces him to leave and become something altogether different.

Changez’s transformation sets up the confrontation with the reader. Changez figuratively speaks to the reader through the figure of the American he sits with at the table. The form of direct address allows him to questions the perceptions of the reader. He does so by saying, “we have not met before, and yet you seem to know at least something about me. Perhaps you have drawn certain conclusions from my appearance, my lustrous beard; perhaps you have followed the arc of my tale with uncanny skill of a skeet shooter; or perhaps...But enough of these speculations!” (76). When he begins by saying “we have not met before,” he indicates that only stereotypical impressions are

being applied when judging his character. His beard and appearance are distinctly Muslim, activating the perceptions that have been constructed by the media spectacle to apply to him. The last comment, “enough of these speculations,” has a dual role. It at once signals that he will not speculate on the identity of the American/reader any longer, and the reader should not apply the perceptions of his culture constructed in the west. He implicates himself, and his culture by proxy, in the same type of foreclosure that goes on in the U.S. toward Muslims. He deals with the perception directly at another point where he addresses the reader directly. He depicts a different version of Pakistani life from within. “In the stories we tell of ourselves we were not the crazed and destitute radicals you see on your television channels but rather saints and poets and – yes – conquering kings” (101-102). He rejects the association of Muslims, in particular Pakistanis, with the extreme position. He points to the media spectacle as the mechanism that defines his culture for Americans, while confronting it with a different story, attempting to give voice to those that have an alternative view. However, he does acknowledge that there are elements of the culture that are radical, terrorists. He does not say if he is one of those or not.

The final chapter of the text acts as an event that attempts to interrupt the reader’s perceptions formed by the media spectacle. It allows the reader to either engage the perceptions built through the media spectacle or listen to the voice of the Pakistani narrator and understand an alternative viewpoint. One route leads to confusion over the ending of the novel, the other to an ethical engagement. Changez suggests the ethical engagement he seeks as he discusses journeys that have made him understand diverse

perspectives. “Such journeys have convinced me that it is not always possible to restore one’s boundaries after they have been blurred and made permeable by a relationship: try as we might, we cannot reconstitute ourselves as the autonomous beings we previously imagined ourselves to be. Something of us is not outside, and something of the outside is now within us” (174). It is the nomadic ideal he talks about here.¹⁴⁴ He is enlightened by the journeys he has taken both physically and emotionally. The travels have changed him and forced Changez to acknowledge that he cannot go back to the previous state of mind. His reconstitution amounts to a struggle to find a voice and gain subjectivity in the face of the foreclosure of the media spectacle that dominates western society.

The text ends ambiguously, but in the murkiness lies the challenge of the story. The two men walk toward the American’s hotel, and the waiter from the café, who has already shown his distaste for Americans, follows them. The American seems to reach into his jacket for a gun while the locals come forward possibly to harm the foreigner. This purposeful narrative ambiguity, a familiar novelist device, leaves it up to the reader to figure out their fate. If readers buy into the perceptions created by the media spectacle, they will find the American to be a secret agent of sorts and Changez to be a terrorist. Alternatively, they may see Changez as an activist and put themselves in the role of the American to ethically engage the subject matter and allow for a voice from the east to come forward. The text begs for this latter interpretation directly when Changez says, “you should not imagine that we Pakistanis are all potential terrorists, just as we should

¹⁴⁴ Rosi Braidotti discusses how the nomadic sensibility is defined not by the literal act of traveling but by the ability to cross any and all borders and challenge existing standards and norms in doing so.

not imagine that you Americans are all undercover assassins” (183). He points out that perceptions work both ways and are harmful in either circumstance. The text confronts them instead of exploiting either. Any other interpretation of the ending falls into the trap Mohsin Hamid lays for the reader, the trap of failing to ethically engage by responding to the singular nature of Changez’s story.

The text throws off the extreme identity that associates Muslims and terrorists in order to confront the state of exception and demonstrate how the exception is constructed as part of the western gaze. The gaze confines Muslims to an association with terrorism, affectively foreclosing the meaning of what it means to be Muslim in the western view. It forms as a direct result of the media spectacle of 9/11 that found common meaning in direct associations. The media spectacle limited the possibilities for response by defining the tragedy and those involved, leaving the western gaze to confine Muslims to an association with terrorism, a move Hamid resists and encourages the reader to resist as well. The resistance is a move that disallows the formation of the state of exception by subverting the extreme association to terrorism.

Each of the texts in this chapter confronts the media spectacle and, subsequently, the state of exception. Each addresses a mechanism of foreclosure that enacts a meaning of terrorism from the corporate media’s point of view. Even the state of exception has the power to foreclose meaning, and it does so in the name of necessity in the time of emergency. It develops in reference to the 24-hour news media that finds ways to associate meanings with the extreme in order to entertain and draw audiences. The state of exception, as it is invoked in the time of an emergency, can be said to be a ratings

ploy for the corporate media. Stories of fear easily draw attention. The journalists and experts predetermine the meaning of the situations instead of letting them to come forth over time and be pieced together by their natural associations. Easy definitions connect quicker than complex explanations. The media spectacle reinforces the need for an emergency state that enacts exceptions to the standard, which become the norm over time. Understanding the process, something each of these texts portrays, allows for it to be engaged.

CHAPTER IV

THE AMERICAN LANDSCAPE

The tragedy of 9/11 occurred on a global scale due to the media portrayals that reverberated in real time and onto screens the world over. In the contemporary world, disasters are mediated phenomena experienced through the lens of the corporate media no matter how close one may be to the actual event. Even those that experience a terrorist attack in a local context turn to the media for information. For many on 9/11, newscasts were the only means through which the attacks were experienced. To demonstrate this point, Don DeLillo shows the pervasiveness of the media in the lives of those directly affected by the attacks. He depicts New Yorkers in the city on the morning of September 11 turning to their radios and televisions for information. When one of the protagonists of *Falling Man* escapes the towers and describes how he was brought uptown, it foregrounds the reliance on the corporate media for information even for the closest witnesses:

A guy came along in a van, a plumber, I think, and he drove me here. His radio had been stolen and he knew from the sirens that something was going on but he didn't know what. At some point he had a clear view downtown but all he could see was one tower. He thought one tower was blocking his view of the other tower, or the smoke was. He saw the smoke. He drove east a ways and looked again and there was only one

tower. One tower made no sense. Then he turned uptown because that's where he was going and finally he saw me and picked me up. By this time the second tower was gone. Eight radios in three years, he said. All stolen. (21)

Through the lack of the radio DeLillo envisions its importance, also acknowledged by the continual replacement after each previous radio was stolen. Not replacing the last one soon enough becomes a crucial mistake even when the attack occurs just down the street. The radio's absence is felt as a disconnection from an attack occurring nearby. A news broadcast is the means even a New Yorker must use to see through the smoke. The driver in DeLillo's scene needs information to make sense out of the situation because "[o]ne tower made no sense" (21). Only a news broadcast could rectify the situation. The landscape of New York and the U.S. was changing, but the driver could not witness the event clearly because his radio was gone. This turn to the corporate media for knowledge was enacted by most Americans at the time of the attack. This reliance extends to those who could see the towers from various vantage points in the city, but the smoke and the unbelievable nature of the attack positioned even the most reliable of witnesses in a place of disbelief, where the authoritative mouthpiece of society, the corporate media, was needed to fill the void left by terrorism.

The media covered the tragedy for days in an endless cycle of horrific footage, headlines, and commentary that varied little from one network to another, or even from the words of government officials. From those in New York City to many around the world, people watched and listened and allowed the media to fill the empty space left by

the absence of the towers.¹⁴⁵ It was definitively a spectacle, as I have defined it in the first chapter, that set in motion a single discourse about the event and closed off dissenting voices. The momentum of the chorus of news anchors unified thought through the uncommon cohesion of narratives and lack of debate. Journalists set aside neutrality in favor of identifying with the public that felt threatened and victimized.¹⁴⁶ It effectively cut off any effort at critical engagement in favor of a unified voice that created a single public discourse for individuals to adopt unchallenged. As a result, Douglas Kellner believes “the images and discourses of the corporate media failed to provide a coherent account of what happened, why it happened, and what would count as intelligent and responsible responses” to 9/11 (29). The media effectively cut off ethical engagement by cutting off response.¹⁴⁷ The spectacle of terrorism requires such a media perpetuation and unity of voice to function, and the corporate media provided it. It was as if the media was doing the terrorists’ job for them, perpetuating a single vision of what America’s response should be and foreclosing the subject.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ In *Women as Weapons of War*, Kelly Oliver argues that the media coverage of 9/11 and the Iraq war that followed added to the confusion in the wake of the tragedy. She analyzes “the ways in which embedded reporting, rolling newsbars, and simulated events in newscasts not only decontextualize events but also blur the distinction between fantasy and reality” (7). It adds to the confusion and misunderstandings of events instead of allowing for authentic witnesses and responses.

¹⁴⁶ Sociologist Michael Schudson explains how 9/11 brought together all of the elements under which “U.S. journalists instinctively and willingly abandon the effort to report from a neutral stance” (188).

¹⁴⁷ This idea comes from an ethics of response and responsibility based on the work of Kelly Oliver and Emmanuel Levinas, which I discussed in Chapter II.

¹⁴⁸ I am referring to the way terrorism is said to be a totalitarian way of forcing a single narrative on a population, as much as it is a way of confronting the totalitarian discourses of a government, or in the contemporary world the forces of globalization.

9/11's clear footage and remarkable targets made it "The Perfect 'Breaking News' Production" for Brigitte Nacos (28). By targeting the famed World Trade Center buildings that dominated the New York skyline and by having the attack fall on a beautiful late summer day, the terrorists ensured that video would be rolling at the exact moment of impact. Nacos compares it to the best Hollywood production, as if it were a made for TV special that drew the largest audience in history for the longest period of time. It was "terrorism as television spectacular, as breaking news that is watched by record audiences and far transcends the boundaries of theatrical productions" (28). The terrorists planned a media assault on America that worked better than they could have imagined because people wanted to fill the gap that was left by the immediate trauma of being attacked. What everyone failed to account for was the way the media instilled the trauma in most everyone except those who walked out of the buildings or stood in the direct vicinity. As the DeLillo example and all of the literature that comes out of 9/11 shows, even New Yorkers turned to the media.

The turn to the media played into the terrorists hands, as terrorism itself is a spectacle that redoubles its effect in the news coverage. Alex Houen describes this best when he explains that on September 11 "the terrorists staged the events to exploit the media's inevitable 'real time' reportage ... instantaneously broadcasting the images of destruction world-wide, the media precipitated its own *im-mediation* of the events, simultaneously making them disturbingly imaged *and* too close to the bone" (Novel Spaces 419). The need to know became the mechanism the terrorists used to carry their

Slavoj Zizek and Henry A. Giroux explain this scenario in *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (50) and *Beyond the Spectacle of Terrorism* (27).

message, and no brand of ethical reporting could change the effect of the horrific images that people watched with a mixture of fear and awe. The news did not remain a kind of mediator; it brought the event directly into the lives of people around the world. For Americans, it had the pointed effect of instilling fear and trauma. In other words, it terrorized the audience, the exact goal of the terrorists.

As the media event *par excellence*, 9/11 makes it hard to separate the differing forms of trauma and their effect on individuals. The vicarious trauma of those that experienced the tragedy through the media, a secondary trauma that E. Ann Kaplan argues is propagated by experiencing a traumatic event through the media, left an almost universal mark on American society. For Kaplan, it was a “glimpse how the political-ideological shaping of 9/11 through the United States media emerges in my [Kaplan’s] being ‘hailed’ by dominant images and discourses” (2). The dynamic representations and various viewpoints that all led into the single defining narrative drew people into a dominant discourse that was unified under the banner of broadcasters’ perceived authority. Kaplan goes on to argue that “9/11 produced a new subjectivity” (4), one that foreclosed the event under the banner of the media’s breaking news line. The new subjectivity moves away from witnessing the actual event and buys into the post-tragedy commentary to gain a skewed perspective that defines 9/11 once and for all. The effect is that the collective trauma stands in for the individual trauma and people are unable to work through the tragedy. Meaning is left to the politicians and the media to decide, instead of being formulated over time and careful consideration. The predicament leads

Kaplan to the pivotal questions, “How could we keep the event open, fluid, specific?” (17).

I turn to a host of New York writers to engage their perspectives on the ethics of representing the tragedy and terrorist event in the infotainment age. Lynne Sharon Schwartz and Don DeLillo each confront the media spectacle of terrorism in productive ways. They each deal directly with the aftermath of 9/11 and the ways in which people are working through the tragedy and maintaining critical distance. John Updike takes as his topic a fictional terrorist event that has not yet occurred to explore post 9/11 society. He uses questionable means to approach the topic but mirrors many aspects of the media’s portrayals. It is an engagement that is altogether different than any of the other writers’ attempts. An edited collection of short stories put together by Ulrich Baer, *110 Stories*, offers the opportunity for 110 New York writers to briefly put into words their reflections in various ways. Many of these writers take on the infotainment medium directly, while appropriating the aesthetic of the genre and confronting its aftermath.

I argue that the literature serves as a way of doing what Kaplan asks, keeping the “event open, fluid, specific,” while responding as witnesses to the actual terrorist event that took place outside of the media representations and subsequent foreclosure. Each writer approaches trauma in a different manner, acknowledging the way it takes away the voice of the victim, and they all allow meaning to come to the event through understanding over time instead of the spectacle filling in the silence. The ubiquitous media continues to flood the background in these narratives to demonstrate how it shapes the American consciousness after 9/11 and influences all aspects of the emerging

society. The media exists as a constant reminder of how the literature needs to crack the all consuming nature of the spectacle and interrupt its influence in order to allow authentic response.

It is the domestic space that each novel focuses upon in order to foreground the way it is an individual meaning that needs to be derived, as opposed to the public discourse dominated by the media. Interpersonal relationships and family dynamics shift after the tragedy, reshaping priorities. Characters retreat into the privacy of their homes and home life in order to escape the public discourse dictated by the corporate media that propagates fear and retaliation. In the turn to the domestic, the novels offer an alternative to the mass discourse and challenge its unity. Literary critic Lawrence Rothberg explains that literature “illustrate[s] the interconnectedness of the public and the private and allow[s] us to reconnect our faculties of seeing and feeling, two forms of connection that both terrorism and mass society threaten” (123-124). Rothberg argues that literature can respond to the spectacle of 9/11 by reconnecting with a space that shields individuals from the communal narrative and allows for individuated response.

The Media Barrage of *110 Stories*

New York writers attempt to respond to 9/11 in Ulrich Bear’s collection *110 Stories: New York Writes After September 11*. The brief stories prove to be a testament to the tricky endeavor of putting into words a response that befits the tragedy. If anything, the stories amount to pieces that add up to form a response to various aspects

of 9/11. The stories belie Maurice Blanchot's thoughts on writing about a disaster:

"When all is said, what remains to be said is the disaster. Ruin of words, demise writing, faintness faintly murmuring: what remains without re-mains (the fragmentary)" (33).

The stories are fragments, averaging about three pages, that reinstitute the sense of absence lost in the media barrage that dominated 9/11's aftermath. The media ruined the words for others to write by recreating the disaster time and time again through vivid images accompanied by voices defining what occurred. Seemingly all was said alongside the initial waves of footage that were burned into the American psyche. How does one attempt to confront such a dominant narrative? By taking what remains, "the fragmentary," and using it to question and confront the media. The stories create absence where foreclosure prevailed and make meaning by acknowledging the inability to realistically represent what occurred. The stories offer questions in lieu of answering what the tragedy means for others. As Lynne Sharon Schwartz says in her contribution "Near November," "But to write, you must know something, and we know nothing beyond the intolerable questions that assail us" (261).

I argue that Schwartz along with the other writers in the compilation longs for silence in the face of the media onslaught after 9/11. The stories provide fragments that alone offer no understanding, while together allow meaning to form on its own terms. The stories utilize absence as a mechanism to respond without closing off other responses and avoid defining the tragedy. Doing so, the confrontation with the media is inevitable and takes place repetitively throughout the text by different voices and different angles but with similar goals, to break down the dominant narrative and open a

space for critical inquiry. To return to Schwartz's story, she summarizes the idea echoed by many writers throughout the collection when her narrator explains, "We long to hear an intelligent word. No, we long for silence. Enough words have been spoken. The words are ashes poured in our ears. Deafened, we seek the right path" (261). Hers is a longing for absence in the face of meanings that have been forced on people in the post 9/11 environment.

The stories are consumed by the search for resolution, yet distinctly avoid providing it for the reader. Jackson Niday describes the stories as being "bound together with preoccupations with resolution," but the stories do not come to a conclusion and/or are preoccupied with the idea of failing to achieve closure. It results in what Niday calls the "*absence of presence* and the *presence of absence*" that manifests itself in the narratives (60). The "*absence of presence*" relates to a tangible loss, the death and destruction that took place in New York, the fact of being attacked by terrorists while at home. The "*presence of absence*" focuses on the resultant lack of voice and how to construct a response to the tragedy while speaking, contradictorily, with a lost voice. In this contradiction lies the motive of the stories and the mode through which they are narrated.¹⁴⁹ The narratives not only respond to the events, but also invite responses by leaving gaps, silences, and fragments in the wake of the totalizing discourse of the media. It is a way of finding meaning through absence in contrast to the foreclosure of meaning that ensued out of the confusion of the tragedy.

¹⁴⁹ I am referring here to the way art speaks through silence, a contradiction that Paul Virilio lays out as being indicative of contemporary society.

The impact of the media barrage in the aftermath of 9/11 can best be envisioned by New Yorkers who both witnessed the event in some form and turned to the television for more insight. A.M. Homes sets up a comparison between reality and representation as the writer describes how he, using the voice of an autobiographical narrator, saw the planes hit the towers firsthand in “We All Saw It, or The View from Home.” The situation proved to be so unreal to the narrator that he had to compare it to a Hollywood production to make sense of it. “I saw imagery that until now did not exist in reality, only in the fiction of film. Seeing it with your own eye, in real time, not on a screen, not protected by the frame of the television set, not set up and narrated by an anchor man, not in the communal darkness of a movie theater, seeing it like this is ... a psychotic break” (151). The depiction describes something that is more real than real, the hyperreal come to life, and only examples from film serve to describe what essentially remains indescribable.¹⁵⁰ It adds to the lack of words to explain what occurred even before the trauma of the violent attack hits the psyche. Homes realizes the essential absence, the lack of words to depict what actually happened, while experiencing the presence of imaginary terms, created by movies, that fill the void. Here is the problem of a true interruption to one’s reality. If something occurs that shakes the foundations of what is

¹⁵⁰ The term hypereality is used here as Jean Baudrillard defines it, where the image that has been produced of something is repeated to the point where it becomes the reality for those that have never seen the real thing. When they encounter the real thing, it does not seem real because it is unlike the representation.

known, and we lack the words to define such a happening, then it creates a hole, a necessary lacuna, to be filled by meaning after the event.¹⁵¹

In this case, it is as if the media gains authority by distancing the narrator from the event and reinstituting an imaginary realm where something like the unbelievable terrorist attack could take place. Homes' point is not to interrogate the lack of meaning, but to show how the media plays a role in constructing the dominant discourse. By the afternoon of the day of the attack, he realizes his own version of what occurred is already changing. His firsthand account is being reshaped by the incessant images on TV. "By late in the day I have the sense that my own imagery, my memory, is all too quickly being replaced by the fresh footage, the other angle, the unrelenting loop" (152). The repetitive images instill a new reality on his psyche that reorients the way events took place. No longer is it seen as a complete interruption of what he knew; now, the loss is filled with footage accompanied by commentators that shape a public discourse. His own personal understanding was "surrendering to what is almost instantly becoming the collective narrative" (152). The public narrative wins over the private by creating a discourse with dramatic images and voiceovers that define what otherwise could not be described using real terms. It leads him to conclude that he has "been sent somewhere else in time, to a different New York, a different America" (153). A different landscape

¹⁵¹ In *Remnants of Auschwitz*, Agamben uses the term "essential lacuna" to describe the predicament of Holocaust survivors whose testimony contained a missing component. He argues, "the survivors bore witness to something it is impossible to bear witness to" (13). This loss of language to describe the attack on the World Trade Center experience by eyewitnesses represents the same kind of missing story. Agamben goes on to say that to understand survivor testimony one must interrogate the missing part. The same type of interrogation is going on in many of these stories.

formed in order to comprehend what took place, even to the eyewitness. The corporate media capitalized on the lack and filled in a discourse when people were searching for terms to describe what occurred.

Jenefer Shute's contribution to the book essentially forms a guide to the media's role in envisioning 9/11. She entitles the story "Instructions for Surviving the Unprecedented (Break Glass in Case of Emergency, If Glass Is Not Already Broken)," and the unprecedented refers to the media coverage. The story is structured as a numbered list of instructions; it forms a to do list in case of emergency, only the emergency in this case is when a media spectacle overtakes one's life. Her first point refers to the way the corporate media outpaces and outreaches eyewitnesses. "1. You will hear the news from people living thousands of miles away, people in other time zones. People who watch TV and know what is happening in your city, your neighborhood before you do" (271). It echoes Don DeLillo's example of the corporate media clearing the smoke for many people, even in the city. Both examples reinforce the point that 9/11 was a media spectacle with ramifications far beyond the local context. The obsequious and omnipotent corporate media knows things before we do.¹⁵² The tenth instruction shows the collective nature of the television spectacle: "You will end up doing what everyone else is doing: you will watch TV. The repetition of images will not dull their impact: the repetition of the unthinkable, at first, renders the unthinkable more, rather than less, unthinkable. You will understand nothing" (273). The television images

¹⁵² The omnipotence of the media is an impression, not a fact. I am saying that the example shows the reliance on the media for knowledge. The experts, the distance, and the confident commentary all leave this impression on people.

reinstitute the trauma again and again to drive home the terror and create a greater lack to be filled by the commentary they offer in the hours of footage to come. It ultimately leads to the way the event was closed off under the guise of a national wound, and a resurgence of patriotism resulted. Shute diagnoses and accepts the predicament while offering these instructions to gain critical insight. The story serves to open understanding into the media's foreclosure of the tragedy.

James Gibbons attempts to confront the media images directly in "The Death of a Painter." The protagonist, Anne, goes out to see the New York skyline on September 12, "displacing, she hoped, the images she'd seen on TV" (106). Anne needed to lay eyes on the reality of the scene in order to gain her own perspective, instead of rely upon the mediated images. It draws the distinction between a television reality and one's own view of the scene. Anne knew the area well, having been an artist in residence, a painter, in the World Trade Center a few years before the attacks, occupying a studio in the upper reaches of the towers. But even after she sees the altered skyline for herself, Anne cannot respond to the attack and returns to her television. The images enrage her, and "[s]he felt mastered by events" (108). The loss of control confuses her as broadcasters plead with people to return to their normal routines. Anne wonders how that is possible when "[s]he felt speechless even in her thoughts. She feared there was no way she could respond to the televised images with pictures of her own" (108). Anne's lack of response due to the confusion of the event and the omnipresent television is exactly what the story attempts to address. Gibbons is asking how people are supposed to respond when the media reinstitutes the trauma by repeating the images and offers dictums telling people

what to do in the meantime. The situation does not allow for response, as Anne's lack of ability to paint shows. "Painting had been the way she had met the world, and now the world was demanding her stunned attention, her submission, her silence" (108). Gibbons opens the door to that silence by responding himself and confronting the cause of the lost voice of the artist. Here, art confronts the media squarely by working through the silence and confronting a cultural industry that takes away individual voices and personal ideas regarding how to proceed after the tragedy.

These examples make clear the magnitude of the media spectacle that was 9/11. New Yorkers did as Paul Auster did, "watched the horrific images on the television screen and looked at the smoke through the window" (35). The rest of the country only has access to the television, but as seen through these examples, it was enough to instill a trauma that dislodged the voice of a nation and allowed the mouthpiece of TV anchors to fill in for it. The stories by these New York writers attempt to take the tragedy back from the infotainment and put it under the critical eye of artists to reopen the discussion and offer new questions. Roberta Allen puts it best when she writes about how she turned off the television and went into the street on September 11 because she didn't "want this to be a TV event" (26). Maybe she succeeded on the personal level, but as for the country and for other writers in the city it remains a media event, and that is why writers take aim at the TV first, attempting to dislodge its hold. Phillip Lopate has a unique explanation that he offers in his contribution. "There was something punitive about the same information, the same pictures, over and over. This has become our modern therapy in catastrophes, the hope that by immersing ourselves in the media, by the

numbing effect of repetition we will work through our grief” (191). He goes on to explain that it doesn’t work for him, and it doesn’t work for the writers that have struggled with the tragedy. The media played too large of a role in the spectacle for it to be easily dislodged, but the critical insight gained from challenging it can go a long way to preventing the television from doing the work of the terrorist.

The American Hero of Updike’s *Terrorist*

Terrorism’s challenge to masculinity, or more specifically, 9/11’s threat to the American male can be envisioned in the stature of the twin towers. Who can argue with the phallic nature of two towers that erectly dominate the New York skyline being knocked down? The rhetoric of revenge that emerged in the aftermath amounted to a rush to regain the stature that was taken from the American male. Susan Faludi chronicles the resurgence of masculinity in the aftermath of 9/11 in *The Terror Dream*. She observes how a “disconcerting number of post-9/11 Web sites” appeared “that pondered the twin towers’ collapse as a symbol of the nation’s ‘emasculatation’” (9). Faludi chronicles articles from *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and other publications of record that each situate 9/11 as a challenge to the American masculinity of the past. One article calls it “the pussification of the American man,” while another asks, “Is the alpha male making a comeback?” (qtd. in Faludi 9). Faludi essentially argues how “A new John Wayne masculinity was ascendant” in the days following the attacks (4). It all returns to a nostalgic version of masculinity that derives from the wild-

west movies of the 1950s. Updike follows the urge to resuscitate masculinity in *Terrorist* by repositioning the white American male into the role of hero.

Terrorism proves to be just the latest challenge to white masculinity that Updike chronicles. Updike has confronted the divestment of white masculinity in earlier texts. Sally Robinson examines how the writer portrays the changing role of the middle-American white male in the late 20th century in *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis*. She argues that “The Rabbit novels ... chart the decentering of white masculinity, from its secure position as synecdoche for American identity *tout court* to its tenuous position as a specific ... category of American identity” (25). Thus, Updike chronicles the movement of white masculinity from its privileged position, the non-race that others are judged against, to a kind of wounded category equal in the struggle for recognition we have come to know as identity politics. In particular, it is Rabbit’s virility and understanding of sexual roles as they change over that latter half of the 20th century that is questioned throughout the novels. However, Updike’s latest novel finds a place where white masculinity can reclaim its privileged identity, by being the hero, the patriarch of freedom in the face of Islamic terrorism. 9/11 presents an opportunity for remasculinizing America in a nostalgic mode.

Updike responds to the “decentering” of the white middle-class male by resuscitating the spectacle of white masculinity in a culture paralyzed by the fear of terrorism. The nostalgic impulses of *Terrorist* link back to the myth of the white male as patriarch and protector prevalent in the early to mid 20th century. The text situates a white male protagonist as father figure to a young man misguided by Islamic extremism,

even going so far as to have the hero fill in as the sexual partner of the young man's mother. *Terrorist* goes on to compare the virility of the hero to the impotence of the youth in order to solidify the resurgence of white masculinity. However, instead of re-establishing the privileged status of the white male in American culture, Updike adds to the spectacle of terrorism by falsely positioning the white male as the sole defender against Islamic terror. Updike's resuscitation of masculinity in the face of fear and nostalgia forecloses the complexity of terrorism by positing the need for a return of the patriarch to save the day.¹⁵³

The nostalgic view of white masculinity that Updike refers to relies upon a unified discourse that for generations foreclosed the idea of the white male in society as virile, strong, and controlling, a decidedly patriarchal view of masculinity. Kelly Oliver directly associates virility, power, and masculinity in the manner that Updike associates the terms: "The virile body becomes a representative of control and power....The virile body is the symbol of manliness; manliness is associated with culture; culture is associated with overcoming the body" (*Women as* 128). But this effectively amounts to a spectacle, because it forecloses the definition of culture, let alone the definition of masculinity, instead of allowing it to take its own shape. Oliver argues that "What brings something into its own is not what limits or confines, but rather what opens out onto multiplicity" (*Women as* 142). This idea guides my investigation into the nature

¹⁵³ The protagonist is also Jewish, a fact not lost on me. I do not focus on its significance because I feel it is just an attempt to bring up Arab/Israeli politics in the discussion of terrorism.

and extent of the spectacle and leaves me to question what Updike's text is performing in what may well be the era of the spectacle.¹⁵⁴

Critics contend that Updike writes what he observes and experiences, portraying everyone as part of the same precarious human condition without privilege and without bias. John Duvall considers him to be a writer who "chronicles contemporary America" with an open mind, paying attention to ordinary American life ("Conclusion: Updike" 162). For Morris Dickstein, Updike has "keenly observant sights," and "a restless, probing analytic gift. His mind seems open to the world, and to the teeming inner world of his own impressions. What others ignore or simplify, he complicates" (15, 16). I do not question Updike's ability to portray contemporary America; his incredible output in almost every literary genre speaks to this point. However, I question whether his chronicles of daily life critically engage the spectacle of terrorism in a way that provides a productive interrogation of the subject, or even sheds new light on it. If they do not, is Updike simply creating a historical record of the contemporary, and is this the space of literature? Does this strategy reinforce the normative, which seems to follow the logic of the spectacle, perpetuating a culture of fear and endless war in the face of terrorism?¹⁵⁵

Adding to the confusion, Updike's text amounts to a cliché version of what Americans think about how Islamic terrorism manifests itself at home. He picks up on

¹⁵⁴ In particular, the media spectacle. Culture becomes increasingly reliant upon media and information networks that compete with one another by increasingly spectacularizing events and identities to the point where only the most dramatic events are noticed.

¹⁵⁵ I want to take this even further to ask, what is literature's role in engaging the spectacle? How do literary texts provide the ethical recognition needed for critical engagement? Awareness is not enough; it needs to be a singular, performative engagement, ala Derek Attridge.

the rhetoric of the media and simply puts forth an uncritical engagement of the most important topic of the time in order to make his heroic narrative work. *New York Times* reviewer Michiko Kakutani finds that the “would-be terrorist in this novel turns out to be a completely unbelievable individual: more robot than human being and such a cliché that the reader cannot help suspecting that Mr. Updike found the idea of such a person so incomprehensible that he at some point abandoned any earnest attempt to depict his inner life and settled instead for giving us a static, one-dimensional stereotype” (“John Updike’s” n.p.). The stereotype mentioned sounds like something the infotainment genre would construct when attempting to build the character of a villain people would fear and ultimately continue watching.¹⁵⁶ The stock and straight forward nature of the character is typical of the entire text. Yvonne Zipp of the *Christian Science Monitor* explains that “none of the characters of ‘Terrorist’ exactly defy stereotype” (n.p.). The stereotypes regarding Muslim extremists come straight from the media’s investigative reporting following 9/11. Updike’s use of such formulaic characters that seem to be taken directly from the headlines limit his critical engagement with terrorism and ultimately limit the text.

Updike’s novel differs from other examinations of terrorism after 9/11 because it does not offer a critical engagement with the dominant narrative; rather, it perpetuates the discourse put forth by the corporate media. The characters go together with a story that befits the fear-mongering of pundits who play the what-if game on national

¹⁵⁶ Recalling this line of argument from Chapter II, the infotainment genre elevates villains onto the world stage by giving them voice. Brigitte Nacos argues that a more ethical approach needs to be embraced so the media does not allow these terrorists to use the medium as a mouthpiece and increase their own stature in the eyes of the viewer.

television. The text asks the question, what if a natural-born citizen took to Islam, became a terrorist, and drove an Oklahoma City style bomb into New York to be detonated?¹⁵⁷ Updike portrays the scenario as blunt as this question. The text does have similarities with other post-9/11 American texts; it focuses on domestic life and the changes that have come since terrorism has been at the forefront of our cultural imagination. *Terrorist* does not dwell on the World Trade Center attacks, nor does it focus on recovering from them. In contrast, it offers a heroic narrative echoing a phenomenon Updike sees returning to the national psyche. He basically appropriates another media discourse to add to the mainstream stereotypes and images of the corporate media.

Terrorist acts as a sales pitch for the role of the American male in a post 9/11 environment. The text compares to an ad that Updike's title character, Ahmad, and his Americanized Muslim coworker, Charlie, discuss while they are making deliveries for the furniture company that employs them: "I'd love to make commercials. Planning it out, putting together the elements – the director, the cast, the sets, the script; those things have to have a script – and then socking John Q. Public with it, right in the kisser, so he can't ever think straight again" (172). The comment depicts a decidedly terroristic view of advertising, a constructed portrayal that interrupts the viewer's thoughts by shocking the senses with an interaction that amounts to corporate violence, the spectacle that I have already linked to terrorism in the first chapter. We can assume the ad will run over

¹⁵⁷ The bomb and truck used at the end of the text has an undeniable similarity to that used by Timothy McVeigh in the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City on April 19, 1995.

and over throughout a single hour to ram home its message, much like the media footage of terrorist acts and their aftermath that has become a staple of 24-hour newscasts since the 9/11 tragedy. Terrorism and advertising utilize the same strategy to drive home their point, repetitive, dramatic, and dogmatically insistent to the point that they interrupt thought processes.¹⁵⁸ Each acts as a sales pitch for an ideology they want to sell to the audience.¹⁵⁹ Updike has an idea of American masculinity he wants to sell to the public in his text.

The ad foregrounds the idea by placing it in the context of the confrontation between Muslim culture and the western world with regard to the question of masculinity. It comes to light in the same conversation in which the above remark occurred. It is a discussion regarding women in TV ads: “Did you see the one on the Levitra ad for guys who can’t get it up?” (171). In direct contrast to the veiled women of Islam, “the one” refers to a seductive woman situated in a desiring posture toward an erectile dysfunctional man, effectively foregrounding the challenge to virile masculinity that Levitra remedies. The message to men: retain virility at all costs; the gaze of the western woman is upon you. Updike’s use of the medium of advertising in this context forms a subtle link between erectile dysfunction and terrorism, positioning the latter as

¹⁵⁸ Once again, this amounts to an aesthetic of terrorism in the media. Advertising uses the same sort of message taking inadvertent scenes of a sexual or overtly masculine nature and turning them into a sales pitch that has nothing to do with the scene. It amounts to the selling of ideology in the same manner terrorism uses violence to sell or draw attention to a specific ideology. Nobody can argue that the awareness of Muslim causes since 9/11 has dramatically increased.

¹⁵⁹ In the case of advertising, the ideology sold actually sells a product, but the pitch remains the same: buy the ideology, buy the product.

an equal challenge to masculinity and the virile body that has been emblematic of white masculinity's privileged position in American culture.

The ad also has a corporate link that brings the discussion of the corporate media into the fold. Charlie points out that "erectile dysfunction is the biggest thing the drug-makers have hit upon since Valium" (171). It makes virility or simply the ability to perform sexually, as a man, a business transaction because it is "the corporations that run this country" (171). They run the country, limiting the sense of who can have a controlling interest to those involved in the business world. Men on the outside, like the two furniture deliverymen, are left with something less than full participation. The fact that both are Muslim provides cross cultural significance to this interest because the way to counter the corporate interest is to either join it or fight it, with terrorism in this case. When the reward for martyrdom, as suicide terrorism is seen in the eyes of the young men, is envisioned in sexual terms, it links to the discussion of the advertisement. Updike does not shy away from making the link. Just before the conversation turned to the Levitra ad, Updike reminds readers of the Qur'an's promised reward for martyrs: "The Book promises: *And theirs shall be the dark-eyed houris, chaste as hidden pearls: a guerdon for their deeds*" (170). The progression of the narrative from one sexualized theme to another foregrounds the theme of masculinity in connection with Islamic terrorism and American corporations.

Updike does not forget the role of the corporate media in this example. It plays a controlling interest in the hands of "media moguls," individuals, presumably male, that

are in command of the airwaves (172). Charlie describes the corporate media's role in society:

What else do they give us, these media moguls? The news is sob-sister stuff – Diane Sawyer, the poor Afghani babies, boo-hoo-hoo – or else straight propaganda; Bush complains about Putin turning into Stalin, but we're worse than the poor old clunky Kremlin ever was... The new powers that be, the international corporations, want to wash your brains away, period. They want to turn you into machines for consuming ... All this entertainment – Madman, it's crap, the same crap that kept the masses zombified in the Depression. (172)

Charlie links the corporate media to a capitalist strategy that simply wants to sell to unthinking consumers. Television effectively provides either feminine news, i.e. "Diana Sawyer" stuff, or propaganda that forecloses politics in an American context pushing the local agenda. The "international corporations" have the real control over information as they maintain the attention of an audience that simply wants more, "zombified" in Charlie's terms. The blame for the current state of the world is clearly on the corporations, but Charlie makes a concession to the one aspect he appreciates: "But the commercials, they are fantastic. They're like Faberge eggs" (173). The only place he finds value on television is when the programming is turned to directly market to the viewer. It shows Charlie's complicity; he wants to be part of the corporation "socking John Q. Public" (172). Charlie simply wants power and is jealous that those in the corporate media have it and he does not. For Updike, this contradiction links the

corporate media and terrorism, linking them to the question of masculinity that underlies each.

As mentioned earlier, Ahmad Mulloy is the title character of the text whose trajectory follows the expected lines once you understand his background. Ahmad was born to a white American mother, Christian in upbringing but not practicing, and an Egyptian father, Islamic, who “decamps,” to use Ahmad’s word, when Ahmad was a child of three. The idea of decamping is an important point that Ahmad makes when explaining his situation, because he does not feel his father left him of his own volition but only due to his inability to make it in America’s capitalist society. Ahmad idolizes his father to the point that at a young age he takes to Islam and cultivates a close relationship with an Imam with whom he studies the Koran regularly. Ahmad chooses a fundamentalist course as if trying to accord with the imagined wishes of his father: “He thought he might find in this religion a trace of the handsome father who receded at the moment his memories were beginning” (99). His study of Islam reaches the point where he basically becomes a fundamentalist, literally believing the words of the Imam and reacting strongly against the various aspects of American culture he constantly comes in contact with.¹⁶⁰ Ahmad passes judgment regularly: “Infidels, they think safety lies in accumulation of the things of this world, and in the corrupting diversions of the television set. They are slaves to images, false ones of happiness and affluence” (4). It gets to the point where Ahmad pits himself against all others around him in a defensive

¹⁶⁰ I am using the notion of Karen Armstrong to say that fundamentalism is a contact phenomenon and diagnose Ahmad as a fundamentalist based on his reactions to contact with American culture (4).

mode that shuts him off from the world around him except for the Mosque and his job arranged by the Imam. The media forms a central front in his battle as it is seen as the purveyor of everything wrong with American society.

At age 63, Jack Levy, on the other hand, represents the ordinary everyday mundane existence of the American middle class. His is a life typified by an unenthusiastic marriage to an overweight woman who cooks frozen dinners, gorges herself on sweets, and is too lazy to get up off the couch to answer the telephone. They have one child who lives across the country and who they rarely see, emblematic of the fact that their parenting days are over and part of Jack's virility with it. Updike further describes this mundane existence as Jack's "personal misery, misery that he 'owns,' as people say now – the heaviness of the day to come, the day that will dawn through all this dark" (20). Jack's misery belies America's lack of interest in anything other than consumerism and fear, two topics repetitively in Updike's sight throughout the text. As the guidance counselor at Ahmad's high school, a fatherly job pointing kids in the right direction, Jack demonstrates his ineffectiveness as he fails to understand the way the younger generation thinks and loses his ability to affect their lives. He becomes "a humorless enforcer of a system that doesn't believe in itself," an apt metaphor for white masculinity (207). It represents Updike's embrace of the average man, flawed in many ways, yet with the chance for redemption.

Jack's revival begins to take shape when he attempts to become a paternal figure to the fatherless Ahmad. Jack determines Ahmad is capable of far more than accepting a job moving furniture, but the boy wants nothing to do with him and views Jack's

outreach as an affront to his religion. Jack's Jewishness may stand in the way, but Updike leaves the idea in the subtext resisting the obvious comparisons to Mid-East politics and avoiding easy interpretations.¹⁶¹ He initiates his role as father figure even though the boy resists every attempt, visiting the boy at home and discussing Ahmad's future with his mother. After Jack's consultation with his mother, a disgusted Ahmad realizes that Jack "now thinks himself entitled to play with her son a paternal, friendly role" (94). Jack sees himself as playing an important part because he believes "the boy needs a father, and if he doesn't have one he'll invent one" (117). The invented father referred to is Islam, with the Imam being the face of the father. This attempt by Jack literally becomes the white man's challenge to supplant Islam as the guiding force.

The paternal role definitively evolves into a resurgence of virility as Jack and Ahmad's mother, Terry, begin a sexual affair. Jack admires the liveliness of the much younger Terry, juxtaposing her against his lifeless existence when he describes her as a "zaftig redhead" that "isn't dead yet," as if she can rub off on him while also replacing his wife (207). She creates a sense of life in Jack, and even if it is only sexual it revives his sense of self by providing him with a semblance of manhood that he lost over the years. At the time, he believes she represents his "last reason to live," his "last reason for joie de vivre" (210). Their relationship consummates his role as Ahmad's surrogate father, but as such demonstrates the white male's inability to provide an identity because Ahmad shuns the role model in favor of the Imam's guiding hand, among other Islamic

¹⁶¹ The purpose of Jack being Jewish eludes me at this point. It complicates the idea that Jack stands for the American middle class, yet all of his actions and the way his existence is described prove otherwise.

influences in his life. However, Updike does not portray Ahmad's resistance in a positive light.

The text juxtaposes Ahmad against the strength of other boys his age and the virility of the sixty-three-year-old Jack. Ahmad's awkward social skills and lack of strength are showcased in his friendship and sexual encounter with a high school friend, Jorylene. The African-American teenager befriends Ahmad only to condemn his actions to her boyfriend, Tylenol, forcing an encounter between the two. Tylenol is athletic, muscular, and a typical bully who highlights Ahmad's lack of physical prowess. But it is a sexual encounter with Jorylene that showcases Ahmad's lack of virility. A friend hires a hooker to allow Ahmad to lose his virginity, and the prostitute turns out to be Jorylene. Tylenol proves to be her pimp, which turns into a further demonstration of his manhood, rather than a disgrace, to compare to Ahmad's lack thereof.¹⁶² And, Ahmad's lack of masculine prowess is showcased by his premature ejaculation and subsequent inability to perform intercourse, something the sixty-three-year-old Jack has no problem with.

The juxtaposition of masculinities serves to further illuminate the meaning of the final scene. Ahmad becomes the expected terrorist, driving a truck into the city loaded with enough explosives to destroy the Lincoln Tunnel heading into New York. It is a scene the resembles the Oklahoma City bombing more than 9/11, except for the religious fundamentalism that drives the bomber toward his task. In an all too convenient twist, Jack discovers the plan and surmises the boy's route to the city, placing himself at the

¹⁶² "For a black man grown up poor in New Prospect, having a woman to peddle around is no disgrace – it's a way to prove your manhood" (Updike 223).

optimal point to join the boy in the cab of the truck. A conversation ensues in which Jack attempts to convince the boy not to carry out his terrorist plan. Ahmad begins to see the irony that all of those that played fatherly roles in his life and set him on his task, his absent father (inadvertently), the imam, and his Muslim friends, are gone and a “tired Jew in clothes as if he dressed in the dark has taken their place” (290). Jack prevents the atrocity by forcing Ahmad to see the humanity of those around him that will die if he triggers the explosives. It figures as the moment when Jack truly becomes the father figure of Ahmad’s life and guides him to the safety of society.

Updike’s novel chronicles the world of fear in which the virile male has an object to combat, transnational terrorism. The viewpoint reinforces the spectacle of white masculinity by rallying white male identity around a cause that upholds its traditional role as guide and protector. The enemy envisioned in the Ahmad’s character is seen as one fighting against American freedom as the boy envisions the country as “lacking strong convictions and the courage and comfort they bring ... freedom above all, though freedom to do what and to what purpose is left up in the air” (167). These statements take us back to the post-9/11 rhetoric of patriotism that was posited by everyone from the president to people on the street and envisioned in the overabundance of flags flying and being worn on clothing. It is just one of Updike’s cliché moments that depict his lack of engagement with Islam in lieu of simply appropriating the dominant discourse.

Fear is peddled in the text to the point where it issues a challenge to the freedom of American society that is eerily similar to that offered by the infotainment purveyors who deal in fear as a means of increasing ratings. The references to “cyberattack,”

“worst-case-scenarios,” and the way “a few pounds of Semtex or TNT” could take out a bridge or local building fill the text with a sense of doom that is palpable to the characters (132-133). And the threat these scenarios offer is a direct assault on America, “An open society is so *defenseless*. Everything the modern free world has achieved is so *fragile*” (132). The change envisioned by the fear and threat of terrorism is one in which “We can never be happy again – we Americans” (132). The voices of the media seem to be taken literally and repeated throughout the text to set the scene. Fear dominates the landscape and the society is forever changed, at least, that is the challenge being issued for the white male to defeat.

Furthermore, Updike uses a comparison with an American hero to further vilify Ahmad and make visible Islam’s challenge to the heroic narratives of the past. It is in a comparison to George Washington by an Islamic-American boy talking to Ahmad that the challenge is issued. “That was Georgie. He leaned to take what came, to fight guerrilla-style: hit and hide, hit and hide. He was the Ho Chi Minh of his day. We were like Hamas. We were Al-Qaida. The thing about New Jersey was ... the British wanted it to be a model of pacification – winning hearts and minds, you’ve heard of that” (181). In the slightly veiled references to America’s war wounds – Vietnam, the current Iraq war, and the middle-east situation that the U.S. is unable to resolve but ultimately linked with Israel – American military might is called into question. In the figure of George Washington, the white male hero becomes a thing of the past because the U.S. is not the fighter in the face of oppression any longer. The Islamic terrorist now fills the role of George Washington according to Ahmad’s friend. It serves as a pep talk for the boy to

commit to becoming a suicide bomber and definitively overtake the role of the hero. Jack's position is thus that of defender of the legacy of George Washington, the Father of the Country.

Updike's novel plays out as an amalgamation of the narratives circulated by the media after 9/11, but also serves as the example of an uncritical engagement. Updike does not attempt to show how those narratives redefine the struggle in a way that doesn't solve the problems or answer the questions being asked. The writer seems to use the dominant discourse to suit his own purpose, reigniting the hegemony of white masculinity and reinstituting the white hero that forms the foundation for such a narrative.

Linguistic Dichotomies in *The Writing on the Wall*

Renata, the peculiar protagonist of Lynne Sharon Schwartz's post-9/11 novel, has an interesting hobby. She clips and collects news stories about unique people and places them in a folder. At the beginning of the novel, she is described as putting clippings in her "Transformed Lives or Everyone Wants to Be Changed folder" (10). The people in the stories all have something in common, a moment when they realize that their life can be something different if they take it into their own hands and change directions. They all begin again after some sort of watershed moment that is described in the text of the article; the moment they "suddenly realized" is the point on which Renata focuses. Something about the change in an instant drives her compulsion to continue

reading the accounts over and over until she knows them by heart and envisions what life must have been like for the people. Each person has a revelatory moment, an event that points life in a new direction. As much as Renata admires the people in the news stories, she does not want to emulate the change in her own life. Renata simply desires to find a new perspective on the past, and she sees the shift in direction by those in the clippings as a means of providing insight on past events by occupying a new position and looking back with a new perspective. Renata understands that she can't change her own history or the facts of the past, "but maybe she could change the way she told them to herself – different words, different emphases. Would that make a new story? Would it make her someone else?" (11). These questions set up the dichotomy in the text between the definitive language of the media that defines 9/11 once and for all, and a more nuanced understanding that arises over time. Language plays a pivotal role in the construction of these meanings envisioned in Renata's obsession with finding new words that offer novel ways of thinking about the world inhabited by language. The media, on the other hand, does not allow for critical reflection or shifting the terms of the discussion to provide new modes of thought. It is a realm where shades of grey are prohibited and the loudest voice with the most simplified means of understanding will fill the confusion.

Couple the definitive language with the repetition of images, mostly shown in fragments, and new, confusing formats to news shows, and the media aesthetic functions as a mechanism of foreclosure in the post-9/11 environment. It capitalizes on shock and fear, the way terror reinstitutes itself in the media, to capture an audience that is

confused and without a language to define what has occurred. The dramatic footage draws the gaze and imposes a single vision upon it. Kelly Oliver defines the situation as “trauma as spectacle,” images that resist interpretation, “inciting the unthinking repetition of violence” (*Women as* 161). The images offer a glimpse of the reality on the ground in any situation, but if they are not contextualized and engaged, then they have little true meaning. Furthermore, the increasingly confusing format of the news with more and more information being offered simultaneously adds to the ability of powerful voices to frame the situation in a definitive manner. The event depicted thus takes on the meaning of whoever has the loudest mouthpiece, picked up by the most media outlets, and plays into the already existing sentiments that surround a traumatic event.

I argue that Lynne Sharon Schwartz constructs a dichotomy embodying the opposition in discourse that forecloses and discourse that responds to the terrorist events. In order to do so, she utilizes the aesthetic of the media, draws the reader’s attention to it, in order to break down its hegemonic voice and substitute more authentic responses to 9/11. Language plays a pivotal role as Renata, a research librarian with a gift for picking up new languages, observes how the world around her changes in the aftermath of 9/11. Her acute awareness of the way language functions gives her a critical edge to witness how the media influences the understanding of 9/11 and draws the population into a unified voice. Such unification does not allow for individual response, limiting the possibility for ethical understandings and responsibility to be part of the discourse surrounding terrorism.

The Writing on the Wall confronts the media blitz that occurred in the days following the terrorist attacks directly. Much like in the short fictions of *110 Stories*, Characters routinely find themselves “in front of the TV. Watching the thing happen over and over” (49). The media becomes ubiquitous, repetitive, and impossible to escape as the infotainment genre takes hold of its audience. Even “In a coffee shop on the boardwalk the TV was on, no escape even at the edge of the sea” (172). The seductive images become more and more real in their repetition and people confuse reality with the media representation. Renata falls prey to the media “fantasies, she didn’t see it [9/11] happen, although she’s seen it so many times since that it feels like she saw it” (45). The footage substitutes for her experience in shaping reality to the point where it becomes her perception of reality. She too is drawn in by the bright colors and music in which the news is packaged and by the horrific carnage of the footage.¹⁶³ As New Yorkers, it is their lives and their environment that form the backdrop for the media attention that effectively forecloses any and all reaction other than a return to the routine of everyday domestic life and blind acquiescence to authority. Unlike Updike’s uncritical approach, Schwartz focuses on the powers that define 9/11 by confronting the media aesthetic that confuses and distracts, allowing meaning to be foreclosed by a simplistic rhetoric of good and evil, vengeance and national pride. A linguistic dichotomy is formed between the simplistic explanations that basic terms offer and words that have more nuance and allow for a more meaningful engagement.

¹⁶³ One of the hallmarks of the infotainment genre is that every story comes with an introduction with music, color, and graphics that set it off from other stories. Viewers come to recognize segments based on these identifying intros. The music sets the mood and the colors and graphics draw attention.

The opposition embodied in this linguistic dichotomy surrounds the question of reality. What form of speech better performs reality for the viewers? Simple terms offering cut and dry explanations are more familiar to people, and viewers relate to them finding a better representation of the reality they know. According to John Fiske and John Hartley, the media uses language to produce “a ‘real-seemingness’ where for practical purposes the signs for reality become the real thing” (129). The reality effect of the news media draws the viewer into a broadcast with the idea that the scenes are real and natural, that the explanation is apparent to all. The commentary need only fit what people are already beginning to believe. Fiske and Hartley argue that the “more ‘realistic’ a programme is thought to be, the more trusted, enjoyable – and therefore the more popular – it becomes. Yet realism too is an artificial construct” (128). It is constructed out of language that lends the perception of naturalness. Viewers do not see the construction if everything fits with their reality and their own conventions of language usage. Schwartz envisions this effect through characters that constantly find themselves “in front of the television for ... the latest installment in the Reality TV hit series” that is the news coverage of the event (170). The comparison to reality TV suggests the audience is drawn in by a depiction of reality, even when it is so far beyond the norm and a complete construct by television producers who pick and choose the footage to show and storylines to follow.¹⁶⁴ It instills a sense of awe and disbelief that

¹⁶⁴ I suggest this based on the notion that reality TV has become a spectacle in itself. The stars of these programs are either so out of the ordinary that their lives are watched in a half disgust, half curiosity manner, or the stars are put in such an unbelievable setting that strange things are bound to occur. Either way, reality TV is a genre that utilizes the idea of reality posed against unreal circumstances to create programming that is beyond

has to be witnessed to be believed, but when seen on a news broadcast, it conveys a feeling of the real thing, as if they have observed the actual event. It explains why Renata begins to believe she actually watched the plane hit the World Trade Center. The media creates a reality effect that can be shared by everyone to produce a type of communal witnessing that forecloses individual response and understanding.

The predicament gives way to a second dichotomy between public discourse and private life that Schwartz uses to set up an engagement with the way the media spectacle affects personal lives. For *The New York Times*' Gregory Cowles, "the novel's most provocative aspect is its questioning of the ways public tragedy can inform and amplify private grief" (n.p.). As with other American writers after 9/11, including Don DeLillo later in the chapter, Schwartz focuses on domestic life and the restructuring of priorities at home in order to demonstrate how the media trauma infiltrates everyday life. The questions raised pertain to keeping the event open and pushing language and representation to new levels in order to engage terrorism. Schwartz represents the aftermath of 9/11 through the inevitable separations in families torn apart by the loss of loved ones. As the event is pushed further into the past, she attempts to find new language to deal with the death of friends and the havoc reeked on families. In a review of the novel, Andi Diehn argues that "Schwartz's great strength is in reminding us of what her book is about, the damage that occurs when whole entities and families are cleaved apart, when two become one, become none" (n.p.). It amounts to an examination

the ordinary. Furthermore, the editing and construction of storylines through piecing together certain segments of footage by the producer are similar to the way the news media cuts images and describes stories to make a drama out of them for the viewer.

of mourning that leads to the question of who and how to represent the tragedy. Is the tragedy to be understood and defined by a media that cannot present the individual stories without them being swallowed by a hegemonic discourse? The novel allows for meaning to be wrestled with and ultimately left to be dynamic and changing as time passes and critical distance is gained. The text serves to reopen what was static in the eyes of those watching the news.

The distancing begins in the opening chapter in a reference to the book's title and its relationship to art. Renata attends an art exhibit where she is fascinated with the informative labels next to the works that offer information, which she calls "the writing on the wall" (7). Of course, the traditional meaning of this phrase refers to an omen that predicts the inevitable hardship to come. Renata applies a negative connotation to the placards because they explain what should be left to interpretation and response of the viewer. When she and Jack, her lover, talk about an artwork, he questions whether the "artist is celebrating the people he loves or is he asking us to pity or condemn them?" (8). Renata replies, "You're not supposed to think. That's the point. The answer is right here on the wall," meaning the card on the wall defines the work for the viewer (8). Interpretation is displaced by the explanation. The question offered by Jack resembles an inquiry of Paul Virilio's where he asks in *Art and Fear*, "*To suffer with or to sympathize with?* That is a question that concerns both ethics and aesthetics" (21). Virilio is concerned with the question of representation and how the viewer of a piece of art is drawn into the moment the piece depicts, a question of "INTERACTIVITY" he calls it (21). It amounts to a question of ethics and aesthetics in that if the sentiment provoked

by the work is an authentic reaction it bears witness to the nature of the work. Even though reactions may vary, the interaction with the artwork is the essential part of what makes it art. The questions raised by Jack and Virilio are not definitively answerable, yet they perform a response that enables discussion and interaction, the exact thing the “writing on the wall” forecloses. Renata’s valid concern that the writing in the placards cancels out the ability to interact with the artwork is the same concern I have with the media. The voiceovers of footage amount to a placard that cancels the ability to interact with the pictures. There is a fundamental difference between an artistic representation and the footage on a newsreel, but when art interrogates the media the two are indelibly linked.¹⁶⁵ The fundamental question of interaction applies to the media all the same.

The question of language works the same way for Renata. She puts her gift for languages to use in her job as a research librarian, which requires her to examine writings in obscure languages, discover their meaning, and catalogue them accordingly. The job forces her to confront “why language functions at all. Why, and this is true of every known language, does a series of words in a certain order make us laugh, and in another order make us cry? ... The puzzling question is, Where is the bridge between sounds or marks on a page and our emotional apparatus? What makes us respond to ink strokes with a quickening of the heart or a surge of adrenaline?” (43). In essence, she asks a question about the aesthetic properties of language. How do words provoke a sentiment or judgment in an individual? This question combined with the question of meaning leads into a single idea about how people make meaning out of words that not

¹⁶⁵ The interrogation is the larger theme of the text, so I link the two.

only define something but invoke an emotional reaction. The meaning is not just made from the definition and interconnections of the words, but also in the connection to a person. Language is sometimes a singular meaning that only an individual comprehends and at other times has a universal significance that everyone can agree upon, while most meanings lie somewhere in between. The final idea relates to Renata's work devising "systems of transliteration," where she constructs a way of representing one language with the written characters of another (42). I apply transliteration to the question of the aesthetics of language, to ask how words can represent an emotional reaction. It queries whether our vocabulary can truly depict emotional reactions in a meaningful way, especially when considering the singularity of many responses. To apply aesthetics to language also means that language does not have an essential universalizing effect. It is open to diverse understandings and nuances of sentiment and judgment that go together with aesthetic reactions.

The text's preoccupation with language confronts the media's ability to force meaning on a particular situation. The media constantly names and defines the event, and with its perceived authority and repetitive voice it fills in meaning where otherwise confusion exists. When 9/11 occurred, people turned to the media to fill the void of understanding left by the shock of an unimaginable attack.¹⁶⁶ It was an event marked by the use of diverse technological means to find information regarding what occurred. It

¹⁶⁶ Ruth Leys discusses how trauma causes a lapse in memory and discourse because "the victim is unable to process the traumatic experience in a normal way" (7). I link the inability to process the event and find voice to the people's turning to the media for information and explanation. The void created by the trauma left a gap to be filled by the all-knowing voices of the media.

made the media all the more powerful to have people on the internet and mobile phones repeating its message. Even people away from their televisions were fixated on the information disseminated by the media. “The people with cell phones and Walkmans told the others what the radio and TV were saying” (Schwartz 45). The far reach of the media effectively allowed it to name the event for the population. Naming is a means of foreclosing a situation behind a label or an ideology; when something is named its real meaning is sutured to an idea represented in the name. An event cannot be named and account for an essential absence or unrepresentable nature within it at the same time.

In the text, Renata attempts to escape naming through the study of obscure languages. She is obsessed with “evocative new words, often words so subtly shaded that they have no adequate equivalent in English, words for feelings and sensations we have not named, and as everyone knows, what we haven’t named we cannot see or take into account” (29). The words that express sentiment can substitute for aesthetic judgments in that they represent a singular emotive response by Renata that contrasts to the constructed response implied in a single name. Her words offer a sharp contrast to the media and represent Renata’s attempt to escape from the overwhelming presence of the media. Even in common terms, “event, calamity, tragedy, attack, Renata hasn’t yet fixed on the right word to use in her head” as opposed to the way “the media say ‘monstrous deed’ or ‘evil act’” to name it and unify the understanding (105).

The ubiquitous media engulfs those that inhabit New York in the days and months after the event to the point where the media have the ability to create cultural memory. Schwartz describes the time as being “so glutted with TV it was like poison in

their eye sockets” (170). The media “was becoming theatrical; it was irresistible” (65). And while everyone else was searching for the means to describe what had happened, “Only on TV is there no shortage of words” (78). The continuation of this theme throughout the text makes apparent the media’s affect as a culture industry. It creates culture by formulating the discourse that circulates and critical decisions are made deciding what angle to take on a story that push certain viewpoints on culture and form new cultural memories that overtake the realities of the situation. These views infiltrate through repetition of a single theme, and Schwartz uses the example of a psychology experiment to make the point. Renata comes across the story of psychologists that “deliberately set out to plant the seed of an imaginary event in the minds of young children” (145). They repeatedly asked a question about a specific occurrence that never happened to the children, until several weeks later the children actually believe it occurred to them. The example makes the point of the way the media construct cultural memory through the same sort of repetition. And considering the ubiquitous nature of the media, the ideas take root quickly and powerfully.

The voice the media picks up to transmit throughout the culture is always the one with the loudest bullhorn, the President of the United States. His words echo in the background of scenes throughout the novel as the President appears on television using blunt and basic language to set a definitive tone for the country’s reaction to 9/11. Renata witnesses the rhetoric of vengeance taking hold, “On the TV screen the President was declaring for the tenth time that he would find the folks who did this and smoke them out of their caves” (74). It amounts to a settling of scores instead of thinking

through and responding to the event.¹⁶⁷ The President, however, does talk of response as depicted by Schwartz, “Our response to history is already clear. To answer these attacks and rid the world of evil” (133). However, it is not the type of singular or ethical response needed for individuals to work through the tragedy. The President’s language overtakes any other narrative and closes off the discussion of what should be done. It doesn’t allow people to respond in any type of singular manner. The only thing people can possibly do is agree that the U.S. should be “prepared to spend whatever it takes” and “hunt an enemy that hides in shadows and caves” (77). Furthermore, the media latches on to the political rhetoric, repeatedly running the footage until it takes hold in the minds of the public.¹⁶⁸ It manifests itself in the words of people that exclaim “there’s going to be a war any day now. They keep promising us. They can’t wait to start killing someone, anyone. They’re men. They have to do something. The only thing that can relieve them is revenge” (268). The observation comes directly from the President’s promise to hunt down the attackers and the media’s speculation that the hunt requires a war of some type. Uncritically running the footage without any discussion of the ethics or validity of what the President or any politician says inevitable codifies the speech and makes it the public discourse. The manifestation of the discourse is realized in the way people pick up the words of the President and repeat them in conversation. Even Renata

¹⁶⁷ Ward Just’s novel *Forgiveness* approaches this very topic as he examines an alternative response to a fictional terrorist event that steers clear of vengeance.

¹⁶⁸ I am not suggesting, nor do I believe Schwartz is either, that the media should not run the President’s speeches. However, uncritically running the footage repeatedly ensures that it will become hegemonic. The authority vested in the office of the Presidency coupled with the lack of dissenting voices and its repetition through culture ensures it will be in the forefront of the public imagination.

finds herself internalizing and repeating the lines. In a conversation with Jack she says, “We will fight the evil ones to the death to preserve our sacred way of life,” a line from one of the President’s public pronouncements. Jack asks, “Didn’t we hear something just like that recently?” (231). To this Renata replies, “We hear it all the time,” meaning she is aware of where the words come from. Hers is a satirical usage that lends a critical eye to the way the words permeate through culture and become the national mantra. Renata is the figure of critical engagement as her constant awareness of the presence of the media points out the way it functions. But, it is nevertheless present in the scenes to pose the problems it presents and to put the discussion squarely in the purview of the text. Four years after 9/11 a novel comes forth to confront the media’s dominance in constructing the narrative of 9/11.

Schwartz documents one of the largest changes in the infotainment genre after 9/11, the crawl at the bottom of the screen that changes the dynamic of news broadcasts. Today, we have become accustomed to the thin line of words offering news briefs that escape as quickly as they came onto the screen. Minds have been tuned to either ignore or pay attention to it according to personal taste, but after 9/11, it was new, adding to the confusion and inability to take everything in. “The crawl doesn’t permit thinking. It’s designed to fracture attention and ensure that nothing lodges in the mind long enough or firmly enough for thought” (133). The stories cross the bottom of the screen too quickly to grasp or think critically about. It fragments attention and leaves Renata in a state of confusion. “She’s a trifle dizzy; the crawl has had its inevitable effect; her mind is in little pieces” (133). It is one more means through which the media took hold of public

consciousness and dominated the attention after the attacks. Schwartz observes its power and documents its effect, and in doing so demonstrates one more aspect of the disorientation after 9/11.

In response to the unified discourse of the media that disallows individual responses to the attacks, people turn to their domestic lives. This phenomenon is a common thread throughout almost all of the post-9/11 American literature that attempts to deal directly with some aspect of the tragedy or terrorism in general.¹⁶⁹ It amounts to a retreat to the privacy of the domestic in order to escape the overwhelming discourse that takes place in public. People do not believe they can affect the hegemonic narrative, so they turn to parts of their life over which they feel some semblance of control. Furthermore, the return to the domestic demonstrates how 9/11 interrupted routine life, and in the aftermath, people, like Renata, find solace in looking at things anew. It becomes Renata's "suddenly changed" moment, like those from the news clippings in her folder. She can form new terms with which to interrogate her past and find new meanings. The return to domesticity embodies the search for personal meanings and individual responses to the attack. Renata takes on new priorities and does things unheard of before the attack. But the question that the opposition between the public and private discourse posits is what terms will she use to uncover new meaning to the past, the public or private discourse? Does the interruption caused by 9/11 have to be filled by the public wave of vengeance and patriotism to which most people in the text succumb?

¹⁶⁹ Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, Ken Kalfus' *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country*, Jess Walter's *The Zero*, and Ward Just's *Forgiveness* are but a few more examples of novels not discussed in this chapter that focus on domestic lives to deal with the public event.

Renata seeks terms to understand, not only the present, but the past too, ones that escape the trap of the media's foreclosure. The search is not only envisioned in her obsession with language, but also in her interest in uchronies. "Uchronies are stories that imagine history taking a different course through some small but not inconceivable turn of events. The 'what if' theory of history" (39). Renata has always attempted to escape the traumatic events of her past so she searches for those points at which if something had changed her life would be drastically different. 9/11 makes her see the way a singular event can change the course of history, and the revelation inspires her to ask the "what if" question about distinct occurrences in her own past that changed her life. These investigations are interspersed throughout the text to foreground a concern with memory and cultural memory. The media discourse shapes the cultural memory that comes out of trauma through means by which I discussed earlier, but does the public discourse reshape personal history? Can the terms that circulate in popular culture change the way a person understands the past? By interspersing Renata's search for personal meaning with the scenes of public reaction to 9/11, the author asks these pertinent questions.

Renata's main point of reference to her past is her twin sister Claudia. The sisters were virtually inseparable in their childhood, sharing the same interests and friends, and forming their own language that only they understood. Being identical twins foregrounds the idea that these are two girls on the same path until something separates them. The event that shifts their relationship and sends them in different directions occupies Renata's thoughts, the theft of twenty dollars from the club treasury. Renata was

treasurer of the club to which the sisters belonged with all of their mutual friends.

Claudia takes the money from the treasury for which Renata is blamed, and Renata later finds out that the theft was done purposely to put some separation between the two girls. Their friends in the club blame Renata and push her out of the group, and Claudia further alienates her by destroying games they played together and not using their own private language any longer. The theft of the money is the event that triggers the course of all the future events in Claudia's life, and subsequently Renata's too. Renata asks the uchronic questions relevant to her past, "what if Claudia had been careless and left the twenty dollars she took from the club's treasury at age eleven – the theft for which Renata was blamed – in the pocket of her jeans, and she, Renata, had discovered it?" (39). It would have shifted the course of their lives and kept them together if she had not been ostracized by the loss of the money.

The rather simple situation of the twenty dollars sets up the traumatic events to follow. Claudia maintains a completely different social circle through her teenage years until she becomes pregnant. While pregnant, she turns to her sister to keep her secret until she gives birth and gives the child up for adoption. The girls' uncle takes care of the adoption through unofficial means, finding a family himself and dispensing with official documents of any kind. The pregnancy and loss of the child send Claudia into a bout of depression until she disappears one evening. Her body is found in the river near their home. Claudia's death initiates a drinking problem in the girls' father that ends in a fatal car crash, and their mother begins to have psychological problems to the point where she needs to be institutionalized.

As Renata interrogates her traumatic memories of the time, she comes to a new realization regarding one part of her past. When she was a teenager, she was bent over adjusting her bicycle in the garage when her uncle ran his finger down her back in an inappropriate manner. At the time, she did not think much of the situation, but 9/11 forces her to reexamine what occurred in her childhood. With the lessons she learns about foreclosure from contemporary society, she reopens what she understood to be her own past and allows new meanings to take shape by abandoning what she thought she knew, letting go of the way she previously named the event, and forming connections that can only be seen with the perspective of time. It forms an abject lesson in how to be faithful to an event and let meaning come forth axiomatically in the manner Alain Badiou calls “fidelity.” Looking back at things from the current perspective, she comes to the realization that he was mistaking her for her sister. The caress was something he was familiar doing to her sister. Renata concludes that the uncle fathered Claudia’s child, a conclusion later verified by a distant family member. Furthermore, once she challenges her previous understandings of the past, she recalls more evidence that leads her to believe the uncle must have had some part in Claudia’s death. Renata realizes that all the proof was at her fingertips all along, but she had given in to the way everyone had described what had happened instead of opening up the terms for herself. She had allowed the words of others to name the event. Renata concludes that “Words are dangerous. Once something is in words, it’s in the world, in the common language. It’s registered in history” (158). The words that named the occurrence offered an easy solution to fill the traumatic confusion of the time. She bought into the common rhetoric

and never thought to uncover what was at hand. Finally, she seeks out her uncle in order to face and possibly take her vengeance on him.

As much as the past trauma in Renata's life resembles the media's naming of 9/11, the confrontation with her uncle mirrors the ethical dilemma of post-9/11 society and foregrounds the nation's turn to revenge as a response to the tragedy. Her uncle lies dying of lymphoma in a Houston hospital when Renata finds him. She questions him about her sister's death and the child until she realizes that she will never hear the confession she wants. Her uncle's pain intensifies during the questioning, but Renata refuses to let him call a nurse by keeping the buzzer away from him. But the torture she inflicts on him does little for her. "She didn't feel the satisfaction she'd envisioned along with it" (200). Finally, he attempts to coax her into killing him by calling her "righteous," but Renata backs away and questions her actions. "Help rid the world of evil, why not?" she asks, "but revenge didn't feel sweet. It felt like more to add to the past" (201). The question marks the turning point where she realizes revenge will not change anything and torture will not garner a confession. The confession comes after the moment of backing away. Renata feels "shameful" and realizes that it was "an ignoble scene she'd played in that hospital room" (205). However, "she was glad" she had done it (205). The scene proves to be the domestic foil for what is happening on the societal level with regard to 9/11. The way cultural memory takes hold and the vengeance that unfolds as a strategy for working through the trauma mirrors what is happening on a personal level. Yet, Renata backs away at the last moment because she questioned her action. Instead of taking the easy road, she backed away to allow the urge for redemption

to pass. If only it were that easy to quell the appetite for vengeance of a population once it has been seeded by “the news, which is full of speculation on how and when the war will begin” (279).

The retreat into domestic life and back to a sort of routine amounts to a recognition that no matter what happens in the world around them they must go on with their lives. The realization includes a sense that the changes that 9/11 initiated will not cease to exist. The event still stood out and “refused to assume its proper location in the artifice of linear time” (281). However, accepting the inability to change the public imagination after the most forceful cultural industry, the media, defines it is the point Renata has come to by the end of the text. Jack explains to her that “We have to live as if we have a future ... Even if the future is an endless war, as the government promises” (294). The endless war will have no bearing on their personal lives, and Renata understands that they will have to live against a backdrop of violence while they live out their lives in peace.

The dichotomy of public reality versus private joy cannot be solved, only put into play, and the novel does just that. Schwartz does not erase the omen of the writing on the wall, but Renata’s realization that living with it does not necessarily mean personal lives will suffer. It is at once an acknowledgement that “Nothing can ever be the way it was” and that life must return to a sense of normalcy. People need to worry about relationships, children, and work more than terrorism. The text portrays this realization by society but attempts to engage it in the way it carries out the story. Schwartz’s novel amounts to an attempt to correct the fact that “really, we have no perspective yet” (295).

By confronting the mechanisms of foreclosure and attempting to remove some of the names from the event that have been forced upon it, Schwartz acts to allow 9/11's meaning to come to be through time and the connections between diverse elements that can be seen only with critical distance.

DeLillo's Fluid Event



Fig. 1 Richard Drew's photograph, "Falling Man."

The title of Don DeLillo's most recent work, *Falling Man*, refers to the famous photograph, shown above in Fig. 1, of a man falling from an upper floor of the World Trade Center on the morning of September 11. The photograph, taken by Richard Drew, raised all sorts of questions about the ethics of representation that the media in the days following 9/11 did not ask as they posted the picture on front pages across the

country.¹⁷⁰ It also angered the public to the point where the photo only ran once, as the media censured itself and removed it and similar photographs from their pages. The question raised by the photo has to do with responsibility to the victim. Was it ethical for the media to present a photograph of somebody's death? Since it was not printed again, the answer must have been no.

In this case, the responsibility to the victim seems to be greater than the need for shocking footage. But for all the ethical questions, the picture embodies a moment in time that does not fail to infiltrate our thoughts upon each glimpse. The photo also recognizes something different than most footage of the attack. By focusing on one person's lonely fall to death, the picture recognizes the individual, thus allowing for recognition of the humanity of each of the victims of 9/11. The ethics of representation are not so clear cut and a decision must be made regarding when the use-value of a representation outweighs the responsibility to the victim.

The use of the picture lies in its ability to be a rupture to what have become the normative ideas about the attacks. The photograph captures the essence of what art photographer and critical theorist Yve Lomax attempts to do in her work, determine how a photo can be an event. She argues that photographs can do so when they initiate a shift and provoke a new line of thought in the viewer. She asks, "when is the event of the photographic image? Indeed, what constitutes an event and how can this be said of the

¹⁷⁰ The photo was retrieved from <http://www.worldsfamousphotos.com/the-falling-man-2001.html> on September 1, 2008.

still photographic image?” (5).¹⁷¹ Lomax’s questions all pertain to the difficulty of understanding a specific occurrence without preconceived notions or ideological agendas. The media culture of the postmodern world makes this act difficult if not impossible. Most acts fit into predetermined categories allowing for meaning to be made quickly and easily. When something that defies understanding occurs, the media quickly fills in with speculation and comparisons creating instant significance instead of allowing new ideas to form. Lomax argues for a photography that can cut through the obfuscating narratives that circulate and draw people in with easy explanations by disrupting thought processes and allowing new connections to form. Her idea pertains to a photography that can bring with it a sense of authentically witnessing an event and harnessing that power to keep the event open into the future for meanings to form based on relations and interconnections over time. In the case of Drew’s photo, does it allow us to view the attacks on the World Trade Center without presupposition, without the layers of media obfuscation, and open new understandings? Does the photo reconnect the viewer to the horror of 9/11 and initiate a reaction that possibly resembles that of the fateful morning?

Don DeLillo’s post-9/11 novel is concerned with these exact questions but removes the ethical dilemma regarding the photo by recalling the event in a different manner. DeLillo’s text recreates the photograph on the streets of New York City in the

¹⁷¹ Lomax is describing an event, not in ordinary terms, but in similar terms to Badiou. She defines it as a process of knowing, as an occurrence that initiates a new line of thought that remains open and changing as the initial occurrence comes to be understood. Her theories look at the way a photograph could be this type of event for a viewer.

form of “a performance artist known as Falling Man. He’d appeared ... unannounced, in various parts of the city, suspended from one to another structure, always upside down, wearing a suit, a tie and dress shoes” (33). He jumps from a building chosen for maximum visibility, a single tether to break his fall, and assumes the exact position of the man in the photograph as he falls. “He brought it back, of course, those stark moments in the burning towers when people fell or were forced to jump” (33). The Falling Man reopens the morning of September 11 by referencing the stark reality of the attacks, not the media portrayal. Nobody can experience the performance and not recall the immediate blow of the tragedy. It cuts through the layers of media footage, commentary, and political rhetoric that so obfuscated and then defined the attacks. The Falling Man draws the gaze of the crowd onto a performance that recalls but does not recreate the horror of that morning. In doing so, the act causes an opening for new ideas to circulate, allowing art to formulate new lines of inquiry and viewers to respond ethically to the event.

Falling Man examines art’s ability to be an event, being faithful to its diverse factors, a difficult proposition in light of the spectacular nature of terrorism in a media saturated society. In doing so, it also raises important questions about the ethics of representation that deal directly with the way 9/11 became a media spectacle that carried forth the goal of the terrorists as much as it offered information to a traumatized society. The confrontation with the media remains at the core of the text, but unlike Lynne Sharon Schwartz and the short fiction of *110 Stories*, the media is left in the subtext. However, like Schwartz and Updike, the text focuses on the domestic life of those living

in New York City in order to highlight the opposition between the communal nature of the spectacle and the individual lives that are caught up in its wave. The text makes connections between art, domestic life, and the story of the terrorists themselves. The last might be the most controversial aspect as DeLillo imagines the story of the lead terrorist to create an event of his own. It once again raises the questions of representation that are central to the confrontation with the media spectacle and the event that cuts through the spectacle and returns a sense of authenticity to witnessing 9/11.

DeLillo employs complex characters, New Yorkers with direct attachments to the attacks, to interrogate the consequences of 9/11 and “Learn something from the event” (140). The text focuses mainly on the routine of daily life while looking at diverse ways each character deals with the tragedy. “In the Ruins of the Future,” a December 2001 *Harper’s Magazine* article by DeLillo, mentions “the smaller objects and more marginal stories in the sifted ruins of the day. We need them, even the common tools of the terrorists, to set against the massive spectacle that continues to seem unmanageable, too powerful a thing to set into our frame of practised response” (37). The smaller stories are the ones that were closed out by the media in the days following 9/11. We need stories of people dealing with the tragedy in everyday life in order to bring specificity to the unimaginable context, the spectacle. The event escapes our “practised response” demanding new coping mechanisms, while the media relies on old definitions to describe the new terrain. DeLillo’s is an attempt to bridge the gap between what actually occurred and the media representations that frame it in a different way. “The events of September 11 were covered unstintingly. There was no confusion of roles on TV. The

raw event was one thing, the coverage another. The event dominated the medium. It was bright and totalising and some of us said it was unreal” (39). DeLillo speaks to the way 9/11 took place as a media event and remains inseparable from it. The inability to firmly grasp and define the massive spectacle making it “unreal” was only made worse by the media. To return it to the real, DeLillo turns to family life and the seemingly inconsequential occurrences that happen to people in their daily routine, but routines where 9/11 keeps coming up in various ways. He employs art to continually reopen the past, allowing connections to reshape and the definitions to take shape with the perspective of time.

Even though the media does not play a major role in the novel, it remains in the subtext as a constant presence that shapes perceptions. Laura Frost writes that “The biggest surprise of *Falling Man* is what is not here: the corporate media, without whose filter it is almost impossible to imagine 9/11” (n.p.). While Frost is correct, DeLillo does not confront the media in the storyline, but the text does have the media spectacle and subsequent foreclosure of what 9/11 means to people as its primary target. It interrogates the spectacle repeatedly to find ways the story can be reopened, asking pertinent questions about the way the media infiltrated domestic lives through its portrayals of 9/11. Frost refers to other novels where DeLillo examines how the media culture constructs the contemporary world and wonders why *Falling Man* differs. “It’s a baffling exclusion. Is it because the novelist needs to wrest 9/11 back from the media?” (n.p.). I argue that this is exactly the question to which *Falling Man* responds.

DeLillo not only deals directly with the media in other texts, but also confronts the media spectacle of terrorism. Stephan J. Mexal describes how *Underworld* presents the media spectacle as a communal force forming a common language and solidarity among people. Mexal argues, “The spectacularization of the terror act ... has the paradoxical effect of *restoring* that ‘common language’; the endlessly televised moment of terror, with all its absence of singularity, in the end does not destroy, but rather recreates, the communitarian historical consciousness” (319). He acknowledges how the media reinstitutes terror in its recreation of the act. However, the solidarity of the spectacle seems to be a positive outcome of media culture for Mexal, one in which a common language is formed to define terrorism, but not necessarily deal with it. Mexal reads *Underworld* in this context, arguing that the text acknowledges the way the spectacle of terrorism functions to make sense out of incomprehensible acts, but also how the spectacle furthers an unreal sense. Terrorism escapes comprehension and the spectacle, paradoxically when thought of in the context of creating communal discourse, reinforces the unreality by defining it under false pretenses. In *Underworld*, “we are thus returned, DeLillo implies, to the very (un)reality of our own reality” (324). DeLillo, in effect, does not posit the argument but documents its existence in contemporary culture. It means that everyone is complicit in the spectacle, right down to those of us who maintained a desire to see the images of the planes hitting the towers over and over again.

Falling Man escapes the complicity by not repeating the trauma and not allowing the communal rhetoric of the spectacle to take hold. Instead, it rethinks various

perspectives to gain distance on the unreality of the spectacle. It focuses on individuals and how they deal with the aftermath in different ways, through art, stories, and questions of how to move forward. It also demonstrates the opposing force of falling back into a meaningless routine. The main story arc of the novel surrounds Keith and Lianne, a separated married couple with one child, who reunite after the attacks. Keith works in the World Trade Center and walks out just before the collapse. Lianne believes him to be dead until he shows up on her front door ready to stay. Michiko Kakutani believes “Mr. DeLillo makes no effort to situate these two very self-absorbed characters within a larger mosaic of what happened that September morning; they remain two not very compelling figures adrift in the anonymous sea of humanity, bobbing alone in their own little life preservers” (“A Man” n.p.). As true as this point may be, Kakutani misses the fact that they are alone to escape the communal rhetoric and adrift because DeLillo refuses to allow them to be swept up in the cultural narrative, at least for Lianne that is. Keith proves to fall in line with the patterns of society. Lianne manages to escape, and the difference between the two sets up the dichotomy the text approaches, the difference between accepting the communal response and formulating a singular one. The communal represents the unconscious aspect of how the media sweeps the public into an ideology, much like an Althusserian ideological apparatus.¹⁷² The common narrative has the same result but functions through the repetition of common images and voices that bring viewers into solidarity with their fellow citizens. In “The

¹⁷² As John Duvall explains it, “the Althusserian notion of ideology as unconscious system of representation” (“The (Super)Marketplace” 433). I link this to describe the same way the media spectacle creates solidarity from communal images and commentary that unifies the public under a common narrative of events.

(Super)Marketplace of Images: Television as Unmediated Mediation in DeLillo's *White Noise*," John Duvall explains how DeLillo confronts this vary aspect of the media in *White Noise*. Duvall describes the way DeLillo uses the media to show how postmodern culture is swept up by an ideology. Duvall describes how DeLillo links the "imagistic" and "conceptual" aspects of the media to form ideologies the shape desire, consumer desire in this case, that is as all consuming as fascism. Duvall concludes, "As *White Noise* argues, the urge toward fascism is diffused throughout American mass media and its representations" ("The (Super)Marketplace" 451). The comparison to fascism does not mean that the mass media leans toward despotic rule, but it does signify a totalitarian impulse by the forces in the media to unify representations. It has a centralization implicit in the medium itself where in postmodern culture meanings are shaped by the most dominant source, the television. In a tragedy, people turn to the TV for information, simply to be told what is happening in the world. The perception of authority people give to the media means it can shape meaning more powerfully than most any other cultural industry. The unified voice has a totalizing effect that posits one meaning on a singular occurrence that does an injustice to the competing narratives that should be considered in any representation.

An ethics of representation considers the way events, like other people, embody a number of competing narratives that carry forth into the future without the confines of a totalizing discourse.¹⁷³ Representation in this ethical form does not amount to a manner

¹⁷³ I link the event to an other to capture the way ethics are thought to be about interpersonal relations. I apply the same principles set forth to deal with others to an event.

of capturing or fully understanding an event. Ethical representations allow meanings to form through time and careful consideration, acknowledging the necessary absence within each understanding and that an event is essentially unknowable in its totality. Furthermore, the event carries forward into the future with the same type of multiplicity inherent in it. For Andrew Gibson, “The ethical relation, then, is a relation to infinity rather than the thought of totality, and begins precisely as the other in its infinity exceeds my representation of it, in the faltering of railing or ‘ruin’ of representation” (57).

Gibson uses scare quotes around the word “ruin” to draw attention to the way that understanding the inability of any representation to fully capture an event destroys a traditional conception of what representation performs. By adding an unrepresentable element to representation, Gibson argues that we have a more ethical form of representation that does away with “an exertion of violence” that occurs when we deny that there are separate elements to an event (57). The violence is a forcing, or naming of an event under one banner that unifies meaning and creates a totality. The ethical relationship realizes the fluid nature of singular definitions that will change with context and more voices. An ethical representation considers these aspects by paying particular attention to the competing voices and not codifying any one of them. For DeLillo and the other American writers in this chapter, it means taking aim at the mechanism that totalizes the discourse of 9/11, the media. DeLillo pays particular attention to the violence it performs and the effect on individuals.

DeLillo shows the effect in a vague scene where the images enter the body and take hold on a person. After a break in the chapter that DeLillo uses to shift the scene, it

is unclear who the characters are because the pronoun references remain unclear, but the media is fully present as the focal point of the short passage. The lack of reference points for the people means that they could be anyone, while the definitive presence of the media makes a connection to everyone. A woman stands watching the replay of the planes hitting the towers, and it commands her attention, holding her in place:

Every time she saw a videotape of the planes she moved a finger toward the power button on the remote. Then she kept on watching. The second plane coming out of that ice blue sky, this was the footage that entered the body, that seemed to run beneath her skin, the fleeting sprint that carried lives and histories, theirs and hers, everyone's, into some other distance, out beyond the towers. (134)

She physically cannot move away from the television as it holds her gaze with an overwhelming drama that she has obviously seen before but from which she cannot escape. Part of its power is in the repetition of the images that already hold sway over her imagination. The footage infiltrates her skin and embodies her, taking away a sense of self in lieu of the totalizing vision that forces her to imagine the victims and form a kind of communal instinct. She recognizes their humanity that links her to them creating a form of solidarity that carries her to the same place that extends out of this world. DeLillo envisions the unity of mind and image and how the television brings the woman into solidarity with the images. The violence of the image occurs in the unimaginable aspect of the trauma. "This was different, a clear sky that carried human terror in those streaking aircraft, first one, then the other, the force of men's intent" (134). She

separates this tragedy from others she has known in its sheer power that institutes itself in the media spectacle. She empathizes with the terror felt by the victims to the point where she is at the mercy of “men’s intent” also. She describes the plane as being “cartoon human” to describe its inhuman nature but all too human emotions (134). She recognizes that there is an aesthetic quality in the way the camera catches amazement. The first plane catches her and the camera unaware, but there is a clear sense that by the second plane something has changed, “we’re all a little older and wiser” (135). It hints at the cliché sense of a changed world after 9/11, but it is a change that DeLillo embraces. The sense of change, however, is directly related to the images that hold the gaze and capture the body, controlling emotion in the process. The media tells the body how to feel about the attack by repeatedly putting the drama there for people to experience.

The unreal images displace any sense of reality to the point where characters better understand the current situation by putting it in the context of a movie. The feeling that “*it’s a movie, it’s a movie*” repeatedly comes up. It puts the images in a context where fit, a Hollywood production rather than the streets of New York or the evening news. It is not a mistake like the child’s imagination inflating the resume of bin Laden. It is a coping mechanism designed to put events in context, and movies are the grounds in which footage like that of 9/11 had been seen before. Even when Keith walks into his dust-filled apartment near ground zero for the first time, he can’t believe it is real. Surrounded with his personal possessions and the signs of his daily life before the attacks, he cannot fit it into any real form of understanding. Lianne has the realization when she looks at herself in a mirror. “The moment seemed false to her, a scene in a

movie when a character tries to understand what is going on in her life by looking in a mirror” (47). The mirror puts her in the scene so she bears witness to the fact that she is present in the circumstance, but it still does not seem real to her. It opens a gap in understanding the situation that media voices can fill.

The media images capture the mind's eye as it does a child's imagination, quite literally in *Falling Man*. The son of Keith and Lianne along with two friends keeps watch from the windows for a man coming down to attack them. They call him Bill Lawton, and the name serves as the title of the first section of the book. It comes from mistakenly hearing the news pronounce the name of Osama bin Laden, “He was hearing Bill Lawton. They were saying bin Laden” (73). There is something to the child making a mistake when it comes to the detail of the name but not making a mistake when it comes to the potential threat represented in the name. The fear produced by the images that surround the discussion of bin Laden travel easier than the details. A child can understand fear and acknowledge when someone has been raised to the level of a villain, an enemy of the entire United States. The child knows that “Bill Lawton has a long beard. He wears a long robe ... He flies jet planes and speaks thirteen languages but not English except to his wives. What else? He has the power to poison what we eat but only certain foods” (74). The terrorist leader has gained the status of super-villain, akin to a superhero in the mind of the child. The media has raised him to the stature of a world leader in whom even a child sees the potential power. The parents acknowledge that they did not keep enough distance between their son and the media spectacle of 9/11, but how could they have? The event permeated culture like it did individual bodies to the point

where there was no escape. Children have a different perspective, and DeLillo puts that perspective in the forefront by naming the section of the book after the child's mistake. The child deals with terrorism by guarding the city with imaginary weapons in the windows of a skyscraper, but the parents deal with the aftermath of 9/11 in differing ways.

Keith falls back on routines in order to deal with 9/11. Instead of working through the tragedy directly, he takes on activities that are governed by rules and instructions that dictate to him how he should carry forth. Whether it be rehabilitating his injured wrist or taking pills, he carries-out the directions diligently and throws himself into the activity. He needs a sense of order to guide him and the direct presence of rules to manage his existence. Poker becomes the main manifestation of this compulsion. At first, "It was the one uncomplicated interval of his week, his month, the poker game – the one anticipation that was not marked by the bloodguilt tracings of severed connections" (27). Poker not only provides a place of unthinking abidance to a set of rules, but the game itself also remains the same as it did before the tragedy. As such, it is his connection to the past world that was routine and ordinary, not ruptured by loss. People come and go, but the game remains the same. Furthermore, poker enables the players in a casual game to create their own rule-based environment. The players in Keith's game shift the rules around, making them more or less confining at their will. They even go as far as to dictate what can and cannot be eaten while playing, or what color liquor can be consumed at the table. "They liked creating a structure out of willful trivia" (98). It gives them control over a certain aspect of their lives during a time in

which they feel that control has been wrestled from them by 9/11. The obsession with order drives Keith to play poker full-time, commuting back and forth to Las Vegas to play professionally and share time with his wife and son.

The routine consumes his life to the point where there is nothing unstructured and mimics American culture's call to return to the structure of capitalism. Keith deals with 9/11 by going so far with his routine that there is never anything out of place and nothing outside of the game. For Keith, "These were the times when there was nothing outside, no flash of history or memory that he might unknowingly summon in the routine run of cards" (225). The game overtakes him and closes everything else out. It keeps any thought of the tragedy at bay and ensures that nothing will occur to interrupt his routine. He pushes 9/11 out instead of working through it. Keith symbolizes the American public that heeded the call to return to normal at a time when normalcy was what had been destroyed. Keith is like consumer culture that falls into the cyclical nature of buying and spending, working and earning so that a person can buy and spend again. It is the cycle of consumer culture that has rules that govern spending habits and desires that keep people purchasing goods to satiate their need. Consumption for consumption's sake pushes all else out as the consumer simply focuses on a simple desire. It fails to properly deal with the tragedy by giving a façade of normalcy to society and allowing people to forget instead of respond.

Lianne, on the other hand, deals with the tragedy in multiple ways. If Keith symbolizes a consumer culture that ignores the event, then Lianne represents the part of culture that attempts to respond and work through the event. Lianne runs "storyline

sessions” for a group of Alzheimer’s patients in the initial stages of the disease (29). She has them write for a period of time and share their stories with the group. The stories inevitably become responses to the planes hitting the World Trade Center. “There were a thousand high times the members experienced, given a chance to encounter the crossing points of insight and memory that the act of writing allows” (30). It is an act of keeping memory sharp as well as exploring a mind where memory is lapsing. DeLillo uses this to explore the possibility that an altered state of mind is what is needed to deal with the way the spectacle of 9/11 has been driven into the public sentiment. The lack of memory that an Alzheimer’s patient deals with could allow the mind to let go of the foreclosure of the event and deal with it by finding “crossing points” and connections through writing. It is writing as response to the tragedy but with the impairment to memory, making it possible in the post-9/11 climate. It also begins to explore art’s response to the tragedy.

DeLillo understands that art has a role in responding to the tragedy, and he speculates on the nature of aesthetics throughout the text and in different voices. Nina, Lianne’s mother and a former art professor, always has alternative ways of seeing art and attempts to help Lianne see in the same way. Their discussions focus on how to see meaning in an inanimate artwork but also be faithful to the connections it makes. She teaches her daughter that it is about more than interpretation, more than just seeing objects on a canvas. Aesthetic responses are singular in nature. “What you see is not what we see. What you see is distracted by memory, by being who you are, all this time, for all these years” (115). These diverse factors play into ways of seeing and inform

aesthetic responses. The emotional replies are personal based on the sentiments of the viewer. Reactions are informed by culture, as well as personal history, and the dominant narratives that circulate at the time. Martin, Nina's long-time lover, has a less contextual view. He tells Lianne to "Stand apart. See things clinically, unemotionally...Measure the elements. Work the elements together. Learn something from the event. Make yourself equal to it" (140). He has a view that is less informed by sentiment and more guided by rationality. He implies that one needs to be shaken from the context in which one stands in order to formulate an authentic response. Martin understands that it is a diverse set of elements that must come together to form a meaning, but he separates them from emotion. The two views do not necessarily compete with each other. They represent DeLillo's questions about the contradictions that lie within the work of art. How do we shake off foundations while acknowledging the impossibility of truly doing away with the influence of personal history? How do we enable ethical responses to art, to reality, to real tragedy? These questions consume the text and the text responds.

DeLillo depicts the Falling Man as an artist that enables authentic response to 9/11. The performance artist has its origins in reality resembling Kerry Skarbakka, a photographer who photographed himself performing as the Falling Man. However, DeLillo makes important changes in the character of the artist in the text. As mentioned earlier, the performance is constructed to be an interruption, to shake the foundations on which a witness stands. It attempts to provoke an authentic response by eliminating context and dispensing with media representations. When Lianne sees the Falling Man staging his jump from a building, she believes it is just "antic street theater, an absurdist

drama that provokes onlookers to share comic understanding of what is irrational in the great schemes of being or in the next small footstep” (163). She quickly dispenses with her idea that it is comic when she realizes that the act “was too near and deep, too personal” (163). She acknowledges that it brings back 9/11 as a “personal” tragedy, even in its lack of direct representation. She needs to “see what she herself was feeling,” a realization that she is going through some kind of original emotional response to the act (163). These are just her reactions as the performance is staged, but it shows how Falling Man catches the gaze and holds attention on something so completely new and disturbing that it shocks the senses into an unknown place. Lianne is watching from the street, but the performance is staged for those coming around the bend on the elevated train. The artist wants “an audience in motion, passing scant yards from his standing figure,” turning the corner without time to think. He stages the event to move the witnesses from their everyday commute, interrupting the routine of their lives, “all jarred out of their reveries or their newspapers or muttering stunned into their cell phones. These people had not seen him attach the safety harness. They would only see him fall out of sight. Then, she thought, the ones already speaking into phones, the other groping for phones, all would try to describe what they’ve seen” (165). It invokes the moment of the attack by at once recollecting the tragedy and shaking the witness from foundations that might dictate response. Onlookers are forced to think about the performance and the terrorist attacks, connecting the two in a manner that does away with representations and media foreclosures to enable authentic reactions.

Being faithful to the event and making the needed connections to understand its repercussions are as much a part of the scene as the actual fall from the building. Lianne recognizes this in the face of another witness. “His face showed an intense narrowing of thought and possibility. He was seeing something elaborately different from what he encountered step by step in the ordinary run of hours. He had to learn how to see it correctly, find a crack in the world where it might fit” (168). In this vision, DeLillo draws the contrast a direct contrast to how 9/11 was understood in its direct aftermath. Instead of looking for possibility, there was a rush to find a single meaning. Instead of understanding something as different from any other terrorist act, the media filled in the context of other terrorism to construct the story. The critical point is where the onlooker realizes that the act does not fit into normal understanding and that time needs to be taken to bring together the pieces and explore the fissure opened in the mind. It is Badiou’s “fidelity,” allowing meaning to come axiomatically, connecting the different elements to find a singular understanding. It keeps the event open and allows meaning to form over time, directly competing with a media that names and forecloses the tragedy.

DeLillo reopens the discussion of 9/11 by offering a view of art as an event that ruptures the dominant narrative and opens new discussion. Like the other writers of fiction that deals directly with the tragedy, he responds by dealing with the media’s foreclosure. It does not change the American landscape, but it offers a means of experiencing art and events that will open new discussions of how to deal with a circumstance that ruptures thought and does not fit into our conceptual framework. The artists search for the terms to describe the event and connect it to the context of society

instead of automatically reaching for the closest voice that sounds familiar and speaks loudly.

All of the novels attempt to rescue the American landscape from the foreclosure of the corporate media. Updike has his own version to add to the discourse, but otherwise, the writers attempt to redefine post 9/11 in a way that accounts for the inability to define what occurred and how to deal with the tragedy. Each text opens a space for ethical responses that allow singular meanings to come forth. The novels dispense with the unified discourse of the corporate media that dominated the country after the attacks. Characters escape to domestic life to make sense of things on a personal level. The media is always there in the background and as a constant reminder. However, the texts allow readers to engage in a way that pays attention to the influence of the corporate media while releasing its stranglehold on cultural meaning.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Contemporary literature has its own method of opening the corporate media's foreclosure of terrorism. It confronts the media spectacle that ensues upon a terrorist event by offering the questions that need to be engaged in order to fully consider the repercussions of terrorism. Literature provides multiple perspectives that allow for singular engagements, and contemporary writers employ these perspectives to help deal with terrorism and work through the aftermath of the tragedy. The literature performs what Alain Badiou calls, the "fidelity" to the event, in which manifest understandings take shape over time and with careful consideration, putting texts in direct confrontation with the media spectacle of terrorism. The process allows for the multiple parts of any terrorist act to come together as individuals piece them together over time. It functions the opposite way the corporate media works in the contemporary world, instantaneous and ubiquitous, allowing the corporate media to foreclose meaning and reinstitute the spectacle of terrorism.

This dissertation hinges on a confrontation between the way the corporate media functions with regard to representations of terrorism and how literature moves in a different direction. The difference is best envisioned through a theory of the spectacle, in which we can see how the media unifies terror acts under one definition and literature breaks apart that unity by presenting multiple and fluid understandings. The key question

is thus: can literature influence the media? In my observation, it has not as of yet. However, this question highlights a future direction for this project, to account for literature's influence on the corporate media. This direction represents a shift from the way the project at hand explores the media's influence on literature. If literature influences media representations of terrorism and adds to our knowledge of how the spectacle of terror functions in society, then writers will also be adding key insights to the study of terrorism, notably by opening the study to fluid and multiple understandings.

I have argued that writers in the wake of 9/11 confront this spectacle due to its all-consuming nature, its foreclosure of terrorism. Thus, literature can both create new understandings of terrorism that keep events fluid and open while also helping to provide a discourse that works-through the trauma, whether it is direct or vicariously experienced. From Richard Flanagan, who questions the corporate media's role in reinstituting terror in the post 9/11 Australian environment, to Don DeLillo, who deals directly with the aftermath of September 11 in New York City, each text forms a unique confrontation with the spectacle of terrorism. It amounts to writers constructing ethical responses to terrorism that offer questions without answering them in order to engage the foreclosure of the corporate media.

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